NOVEMBER 1996
$3.00/£2.00

MONTHLY REVIEW

LIBRARY
RECEIVED
DEC 3 1996
University of Alaska S.E.
Juneau

AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST MAGAZINE

VOL. 48
6

RUSSIAN WORKERS UNDER YELTSIN'S REGIME: NOTES ON A CLASS IN DEFEAT

Vladimir Bilenkin

WHOSE HISTORY IS IT?

Harvey J. Kaye

REFLECTIONS ON THE RECENT WORK OF SHEILA ROWBOTHAM

Vinay Bahl

Also inside:

John Mage reviews the autobiography of Victor Rabinowitz

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS VOLUME 48 NUMBER 6 NOVEMBER 1996

REVIEW OF THE MONTH: Russian Workers Under Yeltsin's Regime: Notes on a Class in Defeat by Vladimir Bilenkin 1

THE BLESSINGS OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE by Michael Parenti 12

WHOSE HISTORY IS IT? by Harvey J. Kaye 16

REFLECTIONS ON THE RECENT WORK OF SHEILA ROWBOTHAM: WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND BUILDING BRIDGES by Vinay Bahl 31

BOOKS
Honest, Able and Fearless by John Mage 43
Walter Reuther, "Social Unionist" by Martin Glaberman 52
Cuba's Health Care System by Will Podmore 58

BIRTHDAY SONG by E.Y. Harburg 62

MONTHLY REVIEW (ISSN 0027 0520) is a publication of Monthly Review Foundation, a non-profit institution. It is published monthly except July and August, when bimonthly, and copyright © 1996, by Monthly Review. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send all address changes (Form 3579) to Monthly Review Foundation, 122 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001.

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS:
122 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001. Telephone: (212) 691-2555. Fax: (212) 727-3676 Email: mreview@igc.apc.org
Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. *MR* is indexed in the PAIS Bulletin, Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life, Political Science Abstracts, and the Alternative Press Index, P.O. Box 7729, Baltimore, MD 21218, tel.: (301) 243-2471.

NEWSSTAND DISTRIBUTION:
B.De Boer, Inc., 113 E. Centre Street, Nutley, NJ 07110; Armadillo & Co., 5795 W. Washington Boulevard, Culver City, CA 90232; Small Changes, 3443 Twelfth Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119; Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London, E9 5LN, England.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE:
U.S.: One year $28, students and senior citizens $23; Foreign $36; students and senior citizens $32.
Libraries and Institutions: U.S. $48; Foreign $55.
Additional Postage: First Class (U.S. and Canada $15); Airmail: Foreign $20.

EDITORS: Paul M. Sweezy Harry Magdoff Leo Huberman (1903-1968)
Associate Editor: W.H. Locke Anderson Assistant Editor: Kira Brunner Circulation Manager: Martin Paddio

NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

The September 30th issue of the *New Yorker* carried profiles of two long-time contributors to *Monthly Review*—lyricist E. Y. Harburg and lawyer Michael Tigar—evoking considerable pride among *MR* staffers. "Yip" Harburg, who died in 1986, wrote more than one hundred songs including "Over The Rainbow," and "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime." Writer John Lahr notes that throughout his long career on Broadway and in Hollywood all of his work evinced powerful social concerns and themes of freedom. Yip, of course, was a socialist of the *MR* variety. He valued this publication, as the verse printed on page 62 and 63 attests.

Jeffery Toobin's profile of Michael Tigar surveys an exemplary career representing defendants confronting the arbitrary abuse of the authority of the state. Tigar has represented draft resisters, and a host of anti-Vietnam

(Continued on inside back cover)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RUSSIAN WORKERS UNDER THE YELTSIN REGIME: NOTES ON A CLASS IN DEFEAT

by VLADIMIR BILENKIN

When in 1917 the Russian proletariat made the first socialist revolution in human history and then defeated the exploiting classes in the civil war it set out to build a workers' state, or the dictatorship of the proletariat as a vehicle for socialist transition toward a classless society. Today, seventy nine years later, Russian workers remain a distinct social class and may seem to be farther away than ever before from the world that the workers of 1917 dreamed of. They have suffered a defeat of world-historical significance. The bureaucracy-led counterrevolution has triumphed. Its consequences for the Soviet working class have been disastrous.

I

Since his coup in October of 1993, Yeltsin's regime has abolished virtually all fundamental economical, social, and legal achievements of the October Revolution.[1] The privatization of the means of production and the commodification of labor have logically led to the abolition of the constitutional guarantee of full employment. At present, at least 12 million people or 15 percent of the labor force are unemployed with virtually no safety net in place. The guaranteed minimum wage and pension which under the Soviet regime roughly corresponded to the actual cost of living now come to only ten

Vladimir Bilenkin is an Assistant professor at North Carolina State University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

percent of it, i.e. far below what is needed to barely reproduce the worker's labor power. The real average income of working class families is now twenty five to thirty percent of that in 1990. These few facts alone clearly demonstrate that Russian capitalism has established a regime of super-exploitation of the laboring masses.[2]

Another hard blow against the working class has been the abolition of their rights to free and universal access to education and medical care, which started the process of rapid commodification of these services. Education at all levels has been stratified along class lines. Even a free full secondary education is no longer guaranteed by the constitution of the capitalist restoration. The vast state and enterprise owned Soviet network of crèches, kindergartens, summer camps, vacation homes, cultural centers for children and adults has been devastated by privatization or otherwise become inaccessible to workers. The results have been a catastrophic decline in life expectancy, the sharp rise of infant mortality, the spread of social diseases like tuberculosis, child homelessness and prostitution.

Restoration hit especially hard at working class women who have lost the rights which protected gender equality and included: paid pregnancy and maternity leaves, special measures for women's safety in the workplace, equal opportunities in education and vocational training, and equality with men in wages and job promotion. Child bearing is no longer considered a social function which the state and society as a whole have the duty to support. It has become a woman's private affair. Abandoned by the bourgeois state, working class women have been exposed to the worst abuses of the market. First to be laid off, last to be hired, they make up about eighty percent of all unemployed and get the least skilled and lowest paying jobs. Sexual harassment in the workplace is rampant and goes unprosecuted. Many women are forced into prostitution as the only means to feed their children.

While the sons of the new privileged class easily escape service in the army, the youth of the working class has been used as cannon fodder in the bloody civil war in Chechnya. Unable to find decent jobs or to receive higher education in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the brave new world of Russian capitalism, they are being recruited into the mushrooming "security services" and the private armies—now mustering 800 thousand men—created by all sorts of plutocratic cliques to defend their fiefdoms from one another and the impoverished masses. Another employer of choice for working class youth is the immense state apparatus of repression which is now more formidable than that of the Soviet period. Today, this apparatus is numerically superior to the Armed Forces, better paid and better equipped. The regime's real enemy is inside, after all.

Perhaps the most dangerous development for the working class in the long run stems from the politics of de-industrialization of the country and its integration into the world capitalist economy as a source of raw materials and cheap labor, a market for inferior goods and obsolete technologies. Since the beginning of the "reforms" there has been a steep decline in the number of highly skilled workers, as the most technologically advanced industries have been devastated and have reduced their output from sixty to eighty five percent. Today there remain only one million skilled workers employed, or but five percent of the industrial working class. At the same time, the number of bureaucrats per 100 thousand residents in Russia is now fifty percent greater than it was in the former Soviet Union. The deskilling and massive unemployment transform ever larger sections of the Russian working class into déclassé paupers and threaten the class with its own disintegration.

Having abolished the constitutional guarantees of the Soviet period, Yeltsin's regime blatantly and daily violates its own constitution; above all, the fundamental norm of bourgeois right—the law of contract. According to trade union sources, by October 1996 the total bill for unpaid wages had reached 40 trillion rubles (almost $7.5 billion), close to a month of the total wage bill of the workers of Russia.[3] Millions of workers do not get paid for months. Often the workers are paid in kind, usually in whatever they produce. In one instance the administration paid its workers in coffins, in another by matches. There have been numerous reports of workers fainting at work because of malnutrition.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There are also moral and psychological dimensions of the workers' defeat that no statistics could ever express. As one woman textile worker put it: "they have taken away from us our dignity, and one cannot live without it." The Soviet masses have now learned by their own bitter experience the truth of Walter Benjamin's warning that "even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins." For the victorious enemy and its "literary representatives" have plundered not only the material possessions of the Soviet working class but also the historical memory of its revolutionary ancestors and their quest for emancipation. Returning this memory to the class is among the most urgent tasks of the advanced workers and socialist intelligentsia.

II

It would seem then that a "situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out:

Hic Rhodus, hic salta!
Here is the rose, here dance!"

Yet the majority of the workers remain politically passive in the face of all the ravages of the counterrevolution. Like a giant shackled by some invisible fetter, the Russian working class has been helplessly watching while the bureaucratic cliques, the criminal bourgeoisie, and foreign capitalists loot and destroy the productive forces of the country created by generations of Soviet workers. However, this passivity has nothing to do with workers' "lumpenization" as alleged by the neoliberal intelligentsia, and less with their "embourgeoisement" as argued by many leftists and even by some workers.

One obvious reason for the temporary delay in workers' political self-organization is that no independent working class organization, in connection with an independent class consciousness, could develop under the past regime of bureaucratic absolutism. As a result, during the fateful years of "perestroika" the entrenched bureaucracy at all levels was able to effectively defend its corporate interests against the atomized and politically inexperienced workers, and even to ma-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nipulate their protests as in the case of the miners strikes of 1989-1990. Of special gravity was the failure to organize and to put up a good fight in the middle years of Gorbachev's tenure when the ruling stratum was weakened by internal divisions, unsure of itself, and compelled to concede to the workers a measure of control over production (the 1987 Law on State Enterprises).

Another negative factor has been the widespread illusion that privatization would give workers more control over production and make the administration more accountable to the labor collective.[4] This illusion has since evaporated as the second stage of privatization, given the green light by the 1993 coup, has enabled the management and/or outside shareholders to amass a controlling interest in the enterprise and to make workers even more powerless than before. In the words of the ZIL auto plant workers in Moscow, they "no longer expect any good either from the government and the president, or from the [plant] administration."[5]

Privatization has also given owners and firm management new, powerful means of repression against workers: the threat of unemployment, the ban on political activity in the workplace, and, increasingly, direct physical terror against worker activists by the so-called security services, or more simply armed thugs hired by owners and administration. This psychological and physical intimidation is further enhanced by the wall of silence about the real conditions of the working class erected by the "democratic" mass media, while the army of former Soviet experts on the national and international labor movements now advise the regime on how best to divide workers and prevent their self-organization. In this they are assisted by Western pro-capitalist unions led by the AFL-CIO international department with its Moscow based operation, the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI).

It is also well known that it is hardest for workers to organize in periods of economic decline, and what we have in Russia is an economic catastrophe. Regular strikes are useless in industries that work at five to ten percent of their capacity while the bureaucrats eagerly wait to shut them down completely, sell them, and get their kickback. In this situation, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

desperate Russian workers have resorted to hunger strikes, in some cases to appeal to "public opinion" despite the news blockade by the "democratic" media, in others to incite their comrades to more militant actions, which may now include rail and road traffic blockades, seizure of enterprises, and locking out administration. Increasingly, industrial action in Russia takes on tragic dimensions rare even in the history of the world labor movement. During the strike at the Cheboksary Tractor Plant last December, three workers committed suicide in despair over being unable to help their starving families.

The workers are also demoralized. Understandably so. For decades, people who called themselves communists told the workers that they were the "leading force of the Soviet society," the creators and owners of the national wealth. Then most of the same people renamed themselves anti-communists and told the workers: "we owe you nothing, you are free to sell yourself in the marketplace, we are free to buy you." Today, betrayed by the Party and the "peoples' intelligentsia," Russian workers stand alone, disoriented and demoralized, isolated inside the country and internationally.

However, the fact remains that in Russia the present situation in class struggle is characterized by a tremendous disproportion between the objective conditions in which the class finds itself and its level of consciousness and organization. This fact is acknowledged and analyzed by the workers themselves. A worker-intellectual from the Union of Tatarstan Workers writes:

> [T]he bourgeoisie itself greatly provokes the working people to revolutionary action by openly looting the people's property and by violating the elementary rights of common people. But the very same bourgeoisie takes its measures as well. It takes good notice of the experience of the Western bosses . It has learned to discourage, to disorient, to disorganize the workers. Do we have a good counterpropaganda, irrefutable strategies, realistic plans, etc.? Given the unification of all left forces it would be possible to develop all that. But unity is what we do not have. I.e., all the objective factors are here. It is the subjective factor that is lacking. The majority does not have an understanding of what kind of workers' power is possible today and exactly what concrete forms it could take under the existing conditions.[6]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

Despite demoralization and the lack of political experience, the betrayal of the union bosses and the animosity of the intelligentsia, Russian workers have begun organizing from below and striking back. Already at this early stage one can be certain that the emerging working class movement will follow the historical tradition of the Russian proletariat rather than the pattern of the Western labor movement, with its institutional differentiation between trade unions and political organizations. Indeed, the emerging Russian pattern has an uncanny, deja vu, quality: the ad hoc strike committee, the permanent strike committee, the factory committee or the workers' council, the city workers' council or the soviet. The historical memory of the class is not easy to erase, after all.[7] What is remarkable about these forms of organization is that even on the level of the strike committee we see a bold combination of purely local demands with political slogans, and in some cases even the attempts to establish workers' control over administration.

Let me illustrate this point by taking a fairly representative example of a local strike. Last April, the strike committee of power station #2 in the city of Vladivostok decided to begin a permanent strike after their one day warning strike in March had failed to convince the administration to pay three months back wages. Along with this immediate grievance, the strike committee pressed these demands: for the immediate stop to the disintegration of the power industry, and for the resignation of the president and the government.[8] The strikers also expressed their non-confidence in the local authorities. The strike committee called a general meeting which made a decision to form a fighting squad for self-defense and to prohibit the use of alcohol for the period of the strike.

A higher form of working class organization is exemplified by the Workers' City Council of Vorkuta. The city of Vorkuta is the center of a region dominated by the mining industry, which makes organization easier. The council is financed from the profits of the local mines by their factory committees who delegate their representatives to the council.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In January 1995, the council held a regional conference. Its proceedings provide a valuable insight into the present state of affairs in the Russian labor movement.

At the conference, the representatives of the administration made two proposals. The first was to dissolve the council because "it had outlived its historically progressive role during perestroika." The delegates found this opinion ridiculous and voted it down. The second proposal was to finance the council centrally, through the corporation rather than the factory committees, and to elect its functionaries at the conferences. The proposal was also voted down because, as the delegates argued, the plan clearly intended to separate the council from its grassroots base and to transfer control over it from the local mines to the corporate administration. On the other hand, when the more radical delegates proposed to transform the council into a regional labor party with its own statutes and membership fees, the conference declined the plan as being "premature in the situation of the low political activity of the miners." In both instances there seems to be a single underlying concern: to preserve the control of the local factory committees over the higher representative bodies. Historical experience has taught workers that a party can become a loose cannon. Instead, the conference decided to place the council representatives on the commissions of the city government, approved the creation of the workers fighting squad in one of the mining towns, and appealed to other local mines to form the detachments of workers militia which could be transformed into the municipal militia in the future. Finally, the delegates approved a political declaration to the citizens of Russia which condemned the war in Chechnya and demanded the resignation of the president and the government.[9]

What we have in Vorkuta then is the early stage in the development of a dual power situation. The council has its representatives in the administration and the local government. It has its own workers' militia. Above all, the council is a genuine grassroots organization of the working class, democratically elected by the local factory committees and closely controlled by them. Should a revolutionary situation arise the council has positioned itself to become a militant staff for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taking power in the city and the province, and afterwards—the ruling legislative and executive organ of the proletarian dictatorship: the soviet. So far the Vorkuta Workers' Council is not representative of the majority of working class organizations. It rather gives us a picture of what Russian labor will achieve tomorrow. Meanwhile, thousands of strike and factory committees operate in the country, learning their political science the hard way and educating a new breed of militant labor leaders.

The present period in the history of the Russian working class is also one of remembering, and critical evaluation of, the Soviet period. The theoretical activity of the advanced workers is marked by a degree of sophistication and realism absent in the "official" Russian communist movement which is largely dominated by the former junior party nomenklatura and middle class intellectuals. These workers want to act theoretically and think practically. They want to know exactly what went wrong after 1917 in order to avoid the tragic mistakes of the past. Says Vasily Shishkarev, an organizer from a Moscow car plant:

> What, in my opinion, was the main mistake of the communist leaders? In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels wrote that "[T]he immediate aim of the communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat." As you can see the *Manifesto* speaks of the conquest of political power for the proletariat, not for the party. This is what Lenin meant when he insisted that every kitchen maid should be able to administer state affairs. But the general secretaries, the successors of the leader of the proletariat, had distorted the ideas of Marx and Lenin and established the power of the party. As the result the party that used to be the vanguard of the working class had become a bureaucratic clique.[10]

Rediscovery of the fundamental ideas of classical Marxism is the single most important development in the intellectual and political awakening of the Russian proletariat. There is a growing realization among advanced workers that the historical tasks of their class can be accomplished only by its own conscious self-activity on the basis of their own proletarian organizations. This realization does not come easy. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ideology of substitutionism and bureaucratic paternalism which has been for so long cultivated from above lingers on in the consciousness of the class and seriously limits its political imagination. Those who blame "betrayals" and "conspiracies" for what has happened do a tremendous disservice to workers by casting them as victims, and by reinforcing the class's view of itself as an historically passive suffering body of the "people." But a genuine class consciousness of the proletariat (unlike that of the bourgeoisie) can develop only on the basis of radical self-criticism and from the standpoint of the historical project that Marxism presents to this class. Russian workers have yet to realize that Lenin and Stalin are but the expressions of their own strengths and weaknesses. In this sense the working class has been responsible for everything that has happened since 1917. Hence, the first task of the new revolutionary (self) pedagogy is to overcome the political infantilism of Russian workers, their deep psychological dependency on political guidance from outside.

Another urgent task is to develop a modern conception of workers' power and a realistic plan of achieving and preserving it. The worker from Tatarstan admirably outlines the complexity of the problem:

> [W]orkers are looking for the solutions to those problems that were not solved during the seventy years of the Soviet regime (e.g., the problem of bureaucratization) ... let us say the revolution has taken place and worker leaders have occupied the positions of power. Their first problem that will have to be solved the next day will be the formation of new legislative and executive organs. It is obvious that in this situation the "gentlemen" and the bureaucrats will quickly grow red again, will prove their revolutionary past, and will again become the heads of all offices because in the heads of the workers there remains the same old understanding of how workers' power is organized. Yet, by itself revolution does not solve all the problems that come after it. Do workers have sufficient knowledge of, or any experience in, self-organizing needed in order to prevent such outcomes? After all, workers will have to realize in practice not some absolute idea but how to use accumulated experience.[11]

These are the voices of an emerging political vanguard of the Russian working class. Neither the old nomenklatura nor the new bourgeoisie, neither their parties nor their gov-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ernment, neither their mass media nor their announced election results, are believed by the new generation of worker activists. These latter now realize that workers must rely only on themselves, that their struggle will bring victory only if the class achieves a high level of political consciousness and self reliance, and if it creates its own political parties and unions independent from other classes and their ideologies. They know that this struggle will be long and hard. And they also say: "This time it will be different."

NOTES

1. There is one important exception. The regime has so far failed to overcome the resistance of collective farmers and to denationalize land. There is no doubt that restoration of capitalist relations in the countryside will be a main objective of Yeltsin's second term.
2. A. Zhukov, "Zarplata, chtoby zhit, a ne vymirat" ['Wage to live, not to die'], *Profsoyuzy* 8 (1995), p. 29.
3. Renfrey Clarke, "Russian Power Workers Fight for Wage Arrears," labr. cis, Institute for Global Communication, September 24, 1996.
4. Simon Clarke, "Privatisation and the Development of Capitalism in Russia." In: Simon Clarke, Peter Fairbrother, Michael Burawoy, Pavel Krotov, *What About the Workers?: Workers in the Transition to Capitalism in Russia* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 240-241.
5. Cited in Boris Kagarlitsky, "Rabochee dvizhenie rabochie i mify" ['Labor Movement and Labor Myths'], *Svobodnaia mysl*, 10 (1995) p. 123.
6. A. Gubaidullin, "K voprosu o vyborakh" ["On the Question of the Elections"], *Mysl*, August 1995.
7. One is reminded of Trotsky's estimation of the historical significance of the soviet form of power. "The rule of the toilers has for the first time been realized in the soviet system, which, whatever its immediate historical vicissitudes, has penetrated as irrevocably into the consciousness of the masses as did, in its days, the system of the Reformation or of pure democracy." *The History of the Russian Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), p. 15.
8. The workers' demand to save their industry is typical and deserves special emphasis. Since the ruling cliques that comprise the "party of order" have been increasingly dominated by criminal and comprador elements the Russian proletariat remains the only class absolutely committed to preservation and development of the industrial base.
9. *Agenstvo sotsialno-politicheskoi informatsii Biulleten.* [The Bulletin of the Agency of Social-Political Information], 2 (9), February 1995.
10. Vasily Shishkarev, "My ne stanem pushechnym masom na rynochnoi voine." ['We Won't Become Cannon Fodder in Market Wars'], *Pravda*, October 5, 1994.
11. A. Gubaidullin, ibid.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE BLESSINGS OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

by MICHAEL PARENTI

Years ago, my father drove a delivery truck for the Italian bakery owned by his uncle Torino. When Zi Torino returned to Italy in 1956, my father took over the entire business. The bread he made was the same bread that had been made in Gravina, Italy, for generations. After a whole day standing, it was fresh as ever, the crust having grown hard and crisp while the inside remained soft, solid, and moist. People used to say that our bread was a meal in itself.

The secret of the bread had been brought by my Zi Torino all the way from the Mediterranean to Manhattan, down into the tenement basement where he had installed wooden vats and tables. The bakers were two dark wiry men, *paisani* from Gravina, who rhythmically and endlessly pounded their powdery white hands into the dough, molding the bread with strength and finesse. Zi Torino and then my father after him used time and care in preparing their bread, letting it sit and rise naturally, turning it over twice a night, using no chemicals and only the best quality unbleached flour. The bread was baked slowly and perfectly in an old brick oven built into the basement wall by Zi Torino in 1907, an oven that had secrets of its own.

Often during my college days, I would assist my father in loading up the bread truck at 5:00 a.m. on Saturday morn-

---

Michael Parenti is the author of *Against Empire* (City Lights Books, 1995). This essay is from *Dirty Truths* (City Lights Books, forthcoming), a collection of his works on politics, media, ideology, ethnic life, and class power.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ings. We delivered in the Bronx to Italian families whose appreciation for good bread was one of the satisfactions of our labor. My father's business remained small but steady. Customers, acquired slowly by word of mouth, remained with us forever. My father would engage them in friendly conversations as he went along his route, taking nine hours to do seven hours of work. He could tell me more than I wanted to know about their family histories.

In time, some groceries, restaurants, and supermarkets started placing orders with us, causing us to expand our production. My father seemed pleased by the growth in his business, but I felt a vague uneasiness about making commercial deliveries to such unconsecrated places as the Jerome Avenue Supermarket. I began to wonder where it would all lead.

Some months after my father had begun to build his new clientele, as if to confirm my worst qualms, the Jerome Avenue Supermarket manager informed him that one of the big companies, Wonder Bread, going into the "specialty line" and was offering to take over the Italian bread account. As an inducement to the supermarket, Wonder Bread was promising a free introductory offer of two hundred loaves. With that peculiar kind of generosity often found in merchants and bosses, the supermarket manager offered to reject the bid and keep our account if only we would match Wonder Bread's offer at least in part, say a hundred loaves.

"Their bread is paper compared to mine," my father protested. Indeed, our joke was: the reason they call it Wonder Bread is because after tasting it, you wonder if it's bread. But my father's artisan's pride proved no match for the merchant's manipulations, and he agreed to deliver a hundred free loaves, twenty-five a day, in order to keep the supermarket account, all the while cursing the manager under his breath. In the business world, this arrangement is referred to as a "deal" or an "agreement." To us it seemed more like extortion.

In response to "deals" of this sort, my father developed certain tricks of his own. By artfully flashing his hands across the tops of the delivery boxes, he would short count loaves right under the noses of the store managers: "Five and five

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

across, that's twenty-five, Pete," he would point out, when in fact it was only twenty-three. We would load 550 loaves for the morning run and he would sell 575. Not since the Sermon on the Mount had the loaves so increased.

"Pop," I said to him after one of his more daring performances, "you're becoming a thief."

"Kid," he said, "It's no sin to steal from them that steal from you." [*Individual competition in the pursuit of private gain brings out the best of our creative energies and thereby maximizes our productive contributions and advances the well being of the entire society.* Economics 101]

I left for a few years to go to graduate school, only to return home in 1959 without a penny in my pocket. I asked my father to support me for a semester so that I could finish writing my dissertation. In return, I offered to work a few days a week on the bread truck. My father agreed to this but he wondered how he would explain to friends and neighbors that his son was twenty-five years old and still without full-time employment.

"Kid, how long can you keep going to school and what for?" he asked. "All those books," he would warn me, "are bad for your eyes and bad for your mind."

"Well" I said, "I'm getting a Ph.D." To this he made no response. So I put in a few days a week of hard labor on the truck. Nor did he complain. In fact, he needed the help and liked having me around (as he told my stepmother, who told me).

When the bakers asked him how come, at the age of twenty-five, I was working only part-time, he said: "He's getting a Ph.D." From then on they called me "Professor," a term that was applied with playful sarcasm. It was their way of indicating that they were not as impressed with my intellectual efforts as some people might be.

On the day my dissertation was accepted and I knew I was to receive my Ph.D., I proudly informed my father. He nodded and said, "That's good." Then he asked me if I wanted to become a full-time partner in the bread business working with him on the truck every day. With all the education out of the way, now maybe I would be ready to do some real work.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I almost said yes.

One day the health inspectors came by and insisted we could not leave the bread naked in the store aisles in open display boxes, exposed to passers by who might wish to touch or fondle the loaves with their germ-ridden fingers. No telling what kind of infected people might chance into a supermarket to fondle the loaves. So my father and I were required to seal each loaf in a plastic bag, thus increasing our production costs, adding hours to our labor, and causing us to handle the bread twice as much with our germ-carrying fingers. But now it looked and tasted like modern bread because the bags kept the moisture in, and the loaves would get gummy in their own humidity inside their antiseptic plastic skins instead of forming a crisp, tasty crust in the open air.

Then some of the bigger companies began in earnest to challenge our restaurant and store trade, underselling us with an inferior quality "Italian bread." At about this time the price of flour went up and the son of the landlord, from whom Zi Torino had first rented the bakery premises over a half century before, raised our rent substantially.

"When it rains it pours," my father said. So he tried to reduce costs by giving the dough more air and water and spending less time on the preparation. The bakers shook their heads and went on making the imitation product for the plastic bags.

"Pop," I complained, "the bread doesn't taste as good as it used to. It's more like what the Americans make."

"What's the difference? They still eat it, don't they?" he said with a tight face.

But no matter what he did, things became more difficult. Some of our old family customers complained about the change in the quality of the bread and began to drop their accounts. And a couple of the big stores decided it was more profitable to carry the commercial brands.

Not long after, my father disbanded the bakery and went to work driving a cab for one of the big taxi fleets in New York City. In all the years that followed, he never mentioned the bread business again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHOSE HISTORY IS IT?

by HARVEY J. KAYE

Given what went into the project to create *National Standards for History,* that is, guidelines for the teaching of history in America's schools, one might have expected that it would be as appreciatively received as the National Standards prepared for the other officially designated subjects (the arts, civics, geography, science, and foreign languages).

First of all, there was widespread recognition of the need to address what came to be known as the "crisis of historical education." Originally recognized as a problem by and for historians themselves in the 1970s, in the 1980s there was increasing public acknowledgment of, and a sense that something had to be done about, the fragmentation and marginalization of historical studies in schools and the accumulating evidence from tests and surveys that the nation's young people were growing ever more ignorant of American and world history. The idea of National Standards seemed to offer a way of composing a coherent narrative of American development and of establishing clear expectations of the historical knowledge to be acquired by students.

Second, encouraged and applauded by the nation's governors—Republicans and Democrats alike—the National

---

Harvey J. Kaye is the Ben and Joyce Rosenberg Professor of Social Change and Development at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Co-editor with Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle of *The American Radical* (1994), he is the author of *The British Marxist Historians* (1984, 1995), *The Powers of the Past* (1991), *The Education of Desire: Marxists and the Writing of History* (awarded the 1993 Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize), and *"Why Do Ruling Classes Fear History?" and Other Questions* (1996). This talk was delivered at a symposium on the National Standards for History, held at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in March 1996.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Standards for History project, like the other such projects, was commissioned by the Bush Administration as part of its highly-vaunted educational initiative, AMERICA 2000, and then renewed by the Clinton Administration as part of its own GOALS 2000. Moreover, although it represented a significant break with tradition—for the setting of American educational standards and requirements had historically been the prerogative of the respective states—the idea of creating *national* standards incited little controversy.

Third, composed at UCLA's National Center for History in the Schools under the direction of the highly esteemed professors of education and history Charlotte Crabtree and Gary Nash, the three-volumes of the *National Standards—United States History*, *World History*, and *History: Grades K-4*, respectively—were made possible by a $1.6 million grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education.

And, finally, to ensure that the Standards would both reflect the finest historical scholarship and be appropriate for their intended grade levels, the almost three-year development process was supervised by a supposedly pluralistic National Council, and entailed repeated reviews by panels and focus groups from all of the major professional organizations—from the American Historical Association, to the Council of Chief State School Officers, to the Organization of History Teachers. (And, to be up front about it, I was myself a member of the first Organization of American Historians' review panel).

Nevertheless, the fall 1994 publication of the *National Standards for History* unleashed, almost immediately, a torrent of rancor and accusation: From the op-ed pages of newspapers and the studios of AM talk-radio shows to the very floors of Congress, the *Standards* were besieged. Overwhelmingly, the attacks emanated from the political right. The authors of the *Standards* were charged not just with "political correctness" (the latter day version of calling someone a "red," "pinko," or "fellow-traveler"), but also with being "thieves," "hijackers," and "balkanizers" of America's past.

And it was not only demagogues and reactionaries like Pat Buchanan and Rush Limbaugh who took shots at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Standards and their authors. They were joined by Lynne Cheney, the former chair of the NEH who, along with the then-Secretary of Education, Lamar Alexander, had promoted and inaugurated the project, and also Bob Dole, the Senate Majority Leader and leading Republican Presidential candidate.

Dole's speechifying was truly remarkable. Before a gathering of the American Legion, he said that "The purpose of the National History Standards seems not to be to teach our children certain essential facts about our history, but to denigrate America's story while sanitizing and glorifying other cultures." In fact, Dole essentially declared the *Standards*' authors to be traitors, claiming that their approach "threatens us as surely as any foreign power ever has."

The attackers weren't even just Republicans. By a vote of *99-to-1* the U.S. Senate rejected the Standards because they did not exhibit, quote, "a decent respect for United States history's roots in Western Civilization." Adding insult to injury, Clinton's Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, reminded everyone that the *Standards* actually had been commissioned by the Bush Administration and he added flatly that "The President does not believe and I do not believe that these Standards should form the basis for a history curriculum in our schools."

How are we to understand the controversy? How are we to construe the anger and venom directed at the *Standards* and their authors? I can tell you that many of my fellow historians were shocked by the virulence of the reaction. Given the persistent crisis of history and historical education, their own sense of isolation and marginalization from public debate and their eagerness to be taken seriously, the broad public agreement about the need for standards; the bipartisan support for establishing them; the appointment of the respected social historian, Gary Nash, as a co-director and author; and the review process to which they were to be subjected; too many of my colleagues naively and foolishly had allowed themselves to forget the history and ignore the politics which had led both to their creation and, ironically, to their later vilification.

However, to make sense of the furor we must think historically and politically. We must recognize the experience

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the agency behind the demand to create national standards for historical education—the most formal and official statement of American and world history ever possibly to be licensed by the Federal government. If nothing else, we must see it in terms of the "culture wars" currently being pursued so avidly by conservative politicians and pundits. But, even more fundamentally, we should comprehend it in terms of the renewed *class war from above* waged for a generation now against both New-Deal liberalism and the progressive changes wrought in the course of the 1960s—a class war clearly resulting in the rich getting richer and working people and the poor poorer.

Indeed, we need to realize that the initiative to establish national standards expressed the hegemonic ambitions of the corporately-endowed New Right to reshape popular historical memory and imagination, and to articulate a grand-governing narrative of American and world development favoring the creation of a new conservative political consensus.

Grasping that, we will also be able to understand that what is ultimately at stake is not just a set of pedagogical guidelines, but the very purpose and promise of historical education and, even beyond that, the vision we hope to pass on to our children of America's past, present, and possible futures.

Historically-speaking, we need to go back a bit. Contrary to the images you might get from watching TV, listening to talk-radio figures such as Rush Limbaugh, or reading best-selling books like Newt Gingrich's *To Renew America*, the sixties were not a "destructive" decade. Undeniably, it was a time of dissent. Truly a generation challenged the powers that be on questions domestic and foreign. Definitely great changes were effected. And, admittedly, violence occasionally ensued (though it was as often instigated from above as from below).

However, if one looks closely at the aspirations and accomplishments of those who sought the changes—whether political, economic or cultural—one comes to understand that, for all the anger, far from trying to *destroy* the old order, the struggles of what came to be called the "New Left" were actually efforts to transform America according to the very ideals being espoused from platform, pulpit, and lectern.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

America was proclaimed to be the embodiment of justice, freedom, equality, and democracy. Though the reality was all too often otherwise, the ideals themselves were powerful and motivating, and a generation of citizens raised in the wake of the Second World War were determined to realize them. Black Americans and their white allies marched and fought for racial justice and equality. Students and young people opposed imperial wars in Southeast Asia. Women once again began to question their subordination and confront the determinism of gender. Workers—contrary to media and social-science propagated myths about blue collar conservatism and authoritarianism—grew increasingly insurgent and demanded workplace reforms. And a fresh generation of historians—*social* historians, intent upon contributing to these new and resurgent democratic movements—set out to recover the experiences and struggles of previous generations at home and abroad and to revise the grand narratives of American and world history accordingly.

In fact, for all of the tragedies and defeats, much was achieved—far more than we often recall. Civil and voting rights laws were enacted. Social and economic development programs were instituted. Medicaid and Medicare were enacted. Educational and employment opportunities were expanded. A war was resisted and a president declined to seek re-election. Workers' wages and benefits rose. The Environmental Protection Agency and Occupational Safety and Health Administration were established. The historical discipline was reinvigorated, and little by little the story of America was made more interesting and progressive than had been allowed by the consensus historians of the 1950s.

Of course, not everyone welcomed the struggles to enhance liberty, equality, and democracy and reinvigorate historical consciousness. Conservatives gathered around the Republican Party; and though Goldwater suffered massive defeat and Nixon was forced out of office, the nervous forces of political reaction did not wait long to regroup.

Unfortunately, the several New-Left movements of the 1960s had failed to join together and articulate a political vision capable of appealing broadly to their fellow citizens.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And their failings allowed for the relatively uncontested emergence in the 1970s of a reactionary politics of the Right, a "New Right," eager to exploit the popular anxieties engendered by a series of severe political and economic crises: Watergate; retreat from Vietnam; Arab oil embargo; global industrial competition; impending municipal bankruptcies; and recession, stagflation, and deepening unemployment (all of which were coming to be thought of as the "twilight of capitalism" or "twilight of authority," depending on your politics).

Driven forward economically by a tightening profits squeeze and politically by the real and persistent fear of the coming together of a broad radical-democratic coalition, the corporate powers-that-be began to mobilize. They first announced themselves via the Trilateral Commission. Sponsored by rich and famous figures like David Rockefeller of the Chase Manhattan Bank—with the assistance of policy intellectuals like Zbigniew Brzezinski and the enlistment of political folk like Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican George Bush (among others)—the Trilateral Commission was an exclusive organization of American, Japanese, and West European corporate and political elites.

Concerned about national and international changes and developments, and the threats they posed to expanding global capitalist enterprise, the Trilateralists' anxieties were publicly announced in their 1975 report, titled *The Crisis of Democracy*. The authors of the report unreservedly stated that the Western polities were facing "governmental overload"—more specifically a "crisis" in which the problems of governance stemmed from "an excess of democracy."

Furthermore, the threat was clearly acknowledged as coming from below—from minorities, women, public interest groups, and labor unions—though, notably, the most dangerous culprits were identified as university and other "value-oriented" intellectuals (that is, historians and their kin). In short, they were saying that "if we can quiet the intellectuals, the masses should eventually fall silent too."

The Trilateralists themselves were far too elitist and multinationalist to be popular at the grassroots level. But they did not go away—in fact, they filled important posts in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carter, Reagan, and Bush Administrations. In any case, the Carter Presidency hardly satisfied those who were eager to reverse the reforms of the sixties, undermine the foundations of the modern welfare state, break the backs of organized labor and the environmental movement, halt the advance of feminism, and silence the critical voices emanating from academe and the public media.

To accomplish these things required resources, organization, ideas, *and* popular support.... Enter the New Right—and, honestly, one can only but admire its making, for it involved getting a most diverse lot to lie down together in the bed of Reagan Republicanism. Who could have imagined a gathering of such strange bedfellows as big corporate executives, small business owners, farmers, old conservatives, libertarians, ethnic neo-conservatives (many of whom were former socialists, social-democrats, and/or liberals), free marketeers (Hayekians and Friedmanites), cold warriors, single-interest groups (Like the NRA), and Christian fundamentalists who had traditionally been either apolitical or Democratic voters.

Though it was not sufficient, money was absolutely essential to the making of the New Right. Fortune-500 CEOs on their own could pay for lobbying and legal campaigns against unions, environmentalists, and community organizations; they could endow think-tanks, periodicals, and public affairs programs; and they could underwrite conservative conferences and Republican candidates. But how was the grand conservative coalition actually to be accomplished? And beyond that, how was the longed-for conservative consensus to be achieved? That is, how was a new post-liberal hegemonic order to be secured?

There is too much to fully recount here but, significantly, the making and ascent of the New Right entailed, from the very start, the use and abuse of the past: The Reagan Republicans—no one more effectively than the Gipper himself—became masters at mobilizing historic and legendary American figures, events and values in order to rhetorically transcend particular interests and draw together their powerful axis.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Addressing Americans' growing anxieties and declining optimism, confidence and hope, Reagan and his cohorts nostalgically harkened back—depending on the occasion and the audience—to some illusive and elusive time before the 1960s or the 1930s. Offering mythical renditions of American experience free of high taxes, government regulations, social welfare, family breakdown, legalized abortions, gun control, rebellious students, affirmative action, critical intellectuals, drugs and violent crime, and racial and cultural diversity, they cleverly gathered their wondrous coalition with promises of restoring "the past."

The past they articulated functioned as the ideological glue of their alliance and, in the absence of a liberal or left alternative, served to attract to their electoral banner voters frustrated by the more moderate conservatism of the disgraced Carter Administration. But the use and abuse of the past was not merely a coalition-building and ballot-garnering weapon. It remained a central feature of Reaganism in office.

I will not recite Reagan's many, incessant, and gross distortions of history directed against liberals, labor, feminists, the poor, and minorities. I will merely note that while he spoke of the past as a time of "shared values" and of the need to restore them, his rhetoric of patriotism and consensus actually bolstered a politics of social division and oppression and a political economy of greed and class inequality.

Moreover, the cadres of the New Right politicized historical study and education (even more effectively than had the New Left) by placing them directly on the public agenda. Notable here is the strategic role played by William Simon, prominent Republican Wall Street investor and former Secretary of the Treasury. In his 1978 book, *A Time for Truth*, and at appearances across the country, Simon sounded the alarm that the United States was, "careening with frightening speed towards collectivism and a statist-dictatorial system," and he implored corporate executives and conservative politicians to fight what he called the "New Despotism."

Again, foremost among the culprits he identified were university academics. According to Simon, historians, humanists, and social scientists were single-mindedly teaching stu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dents and young people to hate capitalism and support anti-business causes. Thus, he called for a "culture war" and "battle of ideas" against and within academe, starting with the cutting off of funds to critical scholarship and pedagogy in favor of financially underwriting the creation of a conservative and pro-corporate counter-intelligentsia in colleges and the media.

As we have witnessed (for almost 20 years now), Simon's proposed culture war has been aggressively pursued both in and out of government Most importantly, the Reagan and Bush victories of 1980, 1984, and 1988, placed the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Department of Education directly into the hands of New Right appointees like William Bennett and Lynne Cheney. And they readily turned their offices into culture-war encampments.

As head of the NEH and, then, as Secretary of Education, Bennett used his posts as bully pulpits, not simply to promote the humanities and historical education but, quite emphatically, to wage campaigns against critical scholars of American and world history and literature. Over and over again, in official pamphlets and speeches such as the 1984 NEH report, *To Reclaim a Legacy,* Bennett charged history and humanities professors with trashing the great works and accomplishments of Western Civilization and subordinating history and literature to their own ideological and political ends. In fact, Bennett's several NEH reports register that for him and his colleagues the teaching of history and the humanities was to be reduced to "transmitting a tradition" and cultivating a one-dimensional view of past and present in which the United States is seen to be both the heir of Western Civilization and the final fruition of its development.

Moving up to the Department of Education, Bennett and his lieutenants called for the teaching of "cultural literacy" for the purpose of "fostering social cohesion and national pride." And, warning of the dangers of failing to transmit the nation's supposedly shared "social and political values," they championed historical education as a kind of "defense initiative" and a means of "legitimizing the political system." In fact, it was Chester Finn, one of Bennett's most prominent subalterns, who launched the campaign for National Standards.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Succeeding Bennett at the NEH, Lynne Cheney continued his ideological and political campaigns. She packed the Endowment's Advisory Council with conservative scholars; personally intervened in the grantmaking process to block or limit awards to left-leaning academics; and publicly went on the attack against social historians and critical humanists.

In her first major broadside, *American Memory: A report on the humanities in our nation's schools*, Cheney warned of national decline and collapse, implying that schoolteachers and professors of history were essentially subversives. A year later, in 1988, in yet another NEH report, *Humanities in America*, she sustained her offensive by portraying critical scholars as disaffected and alienated from their fellow citizens and guilty of "reducing the study of the humanities to the study of politics." At the same time, like her predecessor, she promoted a one-dimensional narrative of American history and Western Civilization.

The culture-wars against academe were also to be vigorously pursued beyond the offices of the NEH and Department of Education. Indeed, with the lucrative support of multi-million dollar conservative foundations—most notably, the Bradley and Olin Foundations, the latter headed by William Simon himself—New Right extra-official efforts to marginalize the left and promote a conservative counter-intelligentsia have been truly impressive. I will note just the highlights of the Bradley and Olin Foundations' funding activities (and, I assure you, I am not exaggerating): To empower conservative public intellectuals against their adversaries, they endowed "chairs" and fellowships at inside-the-Beltway, Fortune-500 sponsored think-tanks and outreach operations like the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute (where, it should be noted, their work would not be subjected to critical academic peer review).

To get their New Right's messages out and about, they bankrolled public affairs and humanities journals and magazines like *The Public Interest*, *The National Interest*, *First Things*, *The New Criterion*, and *The American Spectator* to operate alongside the pre-existing conservative and neoconservative periodicals like *The National Review*, *The New Republic*, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commentary. And, as we know, the New-Right public intellectuals themselves became regular celebrities on McNeill-Lehrer and other current-affairs TV shows like *Capitol Gang*, *Crossfire*, and the *McLaughlin Group*.

To create an image of the nation's universities—history and literature departments in particular—as dens of "political correctness, intellectual corruption, and anti-Americanism," they grubstaked *and* underwrote the promotion of books like Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals*, Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*, Charles Sykes' *Profscam*, Christine Hoff Simmers' *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women*, Martin Anderson's *Impostors in the Temple* (which actually honors me with an attack); and Peter Collier and David Horowitz' *Destructive Generation*. And the corporately-owned popular media quickly picked up their anti-academic tune.

To secure on-campus New-Right beachheads and stir up local controversies, they put up the money for conservative student newspapers like the infamous *Dartmouth Review*, made substantial grants to a number of prestigious higher-education institutions for the founding of conservatively-oriented Law and Economy programs and professorial chairs; and subsidized the formation of the conservative National Association of Scholars.

Finally, in this vein, I cannot help but note in particular two works which have been highly-touted in the media and quite revealing of the Right's ambitions for history. I refer to Arthur Schlesinger's *The Disuniting of America* and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (I will spare you reference to Murray and Herrnstein's even more scurrilous book, *The Bell Curve*). In *The Disuniting of America* (recruited by the Whittle Foundation Channel-One folks), the supposedly-liberal Schlesinger attacks as almost un-American the work of critical historians, and shamelessly and wrongly equates multiculturalist approaches to history writing and teaching with the truly questionable and separatist Afro-centrist approach. Whatever the problems with multiculturalism, Schlesinger's hostility effectively denies the possibility of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dialogue in favor of developing a truly unifying history of American diversity.

Even more indicative of the Right's ambition to fashion a new grand-governing narrative is Fukuyama's book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (paid for by the Olin Foundation). In it, Fukuyama, the former Bush State Department official and Rand Corporation functionary, argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union represents not simply the victory of Western liberalism over Soviet communism but, even more epochally, the final stage of History. In other words, we are to believe that the apparent global triumph of capitalism has brought us to the terminus of a world-historical development—the culmination of universal history. There are and will be no grander alternatives—the age of capital is forever.

On reflection, wasn't this essentially the very same vision of history concurrently being advanced for historical study and thought by Bennett and Cheney? One could easily assume that the Right's purpose for historical education was to attest to and celebrate the end of history.

Meanwhile, back at the NEH and Department of Education, the very same cohort was proceeding with plans to establish the National Standards for History project. Remember that when they actually commissioned the project, Cheney and Alexander had every reason to believe that they would be in position to oversee its development. Bush had triumphed in the Gulf War; surely, they must have thought he would be re-elected. In fact, in 1992, Lynne Cheney—not to be mistaken for her husband, Dick, who was running things over at the Defense Department—gave her approval to what she understood to be the first draft of the Standards, a volume entitled *Lessons from History.*

The problem, for a variety of very solid reasons, is that the many professional groups which also reviewed *Lessons* did not give their approval. I well recall the original OAH panel's deliberations over the American chapters of *Lessons.* My own criticisms—many of which were shared by my colleagues—included: 1) that *Lessons from History* was composed in such a way as to present an economic and technological-determinist rendition of history (bizarrely enough, it was so deterministic in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

character, you could imagine it had been written by an old-fashioned Orthodox Marxist); 2) that *Lessons* offered a boring evolutionary narrative of American political life and failed to capture the dramatic political, ideological and social struggles which have propelled the nation's development; 3) that, while it did significantly attend to matters of race and gender (though not to anyone's real satisfaction), its treatment of that traditionally taboo subject, class, was spotty, weak and mishandled, especially regarding the politics of the working classes and their labor unions; and 4) that its references to the history of the American radical tradition were inadequate and unacceptable (in fact, American socialism was all but ignored except as the subject of "red scares," and Eugene Debs was nowhere referred to).

Moreover, we were all shocked to find that the Second World War and the Cold War had been lumped together as one historical era, giving the misleading impression that the two sets of events were a single struggle against what cold warriors preferred to call "totalitarianism" or, even worse, that the war against fascism was merely a prelude to, or first phase of the confrontation with communism.

Lessons from History was so bad that a couple of the professional organizations, including the powerful American Historical Association, threatened to pull out of the project entirely. I cannot help but note here conversations had at the time with a few of the more progressive members of the authorial and editorial team responsible for composing the *National Standards.* They revealed that *Lessons from History* had entailed certain key compromises with and, occasionally, even deference to the more conservative members of the writing team. However, those with whom I spoke also assumed or, at least, hoped that their professional colleagues on the respective review boards would insist on significant changes and revisions, compelling—or better, enabling—them to construct a far more critical version of the *Standards.*Thus, the whole thing went back to UCLA and its authors eagerly set to work dramatically reconstructing it—again, subject to repeated reviews by the prescribed professional panels.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of course, in the wake of the 1992 elections, Cheney and her ilk were themselves no longer able to control or, even, oversee developments. As a consequence, the *National Standards for History* project proceeded in an apparently much more pluralistic and critical fashion than it would have if Bush had been re-elected and Cheney had continued to run the NEH.

Though far from perfect, the *National Standards* which emerged two years later were—as they were supposed to be—far, far more reflective of the latest and finest historical scholarship than the Cheney-approved but professionally-rejected *Lessons from History*. Ironically, what originally had been so ardently desired by the Right ended up becoming just what they had feared to begin with: That is, standards for historical education which—referring to the U.S. volume—reflect the nation's diversity; appreciate the struggles that have been so central to its development; articulate the tragedy, irony and progress of American life; and challenge students to critically approach the connection between past and present—thereby, proposing that the making of history is far from over.

Having looked at the controversy in historical and political perspective, we should now be able to understand why all hell broke loose on the Right when the *Standards* actually appeared. We should now be able to appreciate the outrage of the out-of-office New Right politicians and conservative talk-radio showmen. Nevertheless, I cannot resist pausing to note how upset Lynne Cheney herself was with the Standards project. From her new post as Distinguished Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and in the pages of her newly-released and well-publicized book, *Telling the Truth*, Cheney not only called for the rejection of the Standards themselves, she also called for the elimination, or privatization, of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the very institution she herself had headed.

"Fair enough," you will say, "but how do we explain the response of the Democratic Senators and the Clinton Administration?" One might instantly reply by asking, first, how many members of either party in the Senate do you think even looked at the three volumes; and, second, since when did the Clinton Administration not defer to its Republican antagonists?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But such answers are just avoiding the harsher reality that, after twenty years, the New Right has indeed succeeded all too well in dominating and reshaping American public discourse. And here critical historians also have themselves partially to blame, for we have evidently not lived up to all of our expectations and aspirations.

We came into this discipline to recover the past and connect it to the struggles of the day. We can proudly say that we have recovered the past more substantially and magnificently than any previous generation—just consider the scholarship we have accomplished on relations of exploitation and oppression and the historically diverse struggles of resistance, rebellion, and revolution opposing them. Moreover, we have significantly transformed historical pedagogy and curricula at all levels of education and schooling.

Yet we must admit that we have not sufficiently connected our labors to the lives, labors, and concerns of our fellow citizens. And, truly, in this respect there is much to be done. Not only must we find ways to more effectively answer abuses, fabrications, and corruptions of the past with historical truths and insights; we must also find ways to more effectively articulate and communicate our historiographical accomplishments so as to better engage and activate the historical memory, consciousness, and imagination of working people.

Most immediately, I hope the *Standards* controversy serves to awaken us to what is at stake—not just the *Standards* themselves but also, as I said at the outset, the very purpose and promise of historical education *and* the vision of past, present, and possible futures we hope to teach our children. This cannot be stressed enough, for the Standards themselves are being revised and elections are upcoming.

Therefore, we must ask, and make it an issue on the public political agenda: Are historical study and thought to promulgate an end-of-history narrative in favor of securing the status quo and the hegemony of corporate capital? Or, are they to cultivate a more active and critical historical memory, consciousness, and imagination, in favor of extending and deepening liberty, equality, and democracy? In other words, "whose history is it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REFLECTIONS ON THE RECENT WORK OF SHEILA ROWBOTHAM: WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND BUILDING BRIDGES

by VINAY BAHL

Sheila Rowbotham is an active British socialist feminist as well as a political-historical writer. Growing up intellectually and politically in the Marxist tradition as shaped by Edward and Dorothy Thompson, growing and changing in struggles lost and won, Rowbotham continues to base her analyses in history. Her personal history and memory contribute significant details to the political analyses she offers, especially of grassroots movements. Rowbotham lives the life of a politically committed activist and an historical reporter, while a single mother actively engaged in her community. She has written fifteen books, innumerable articles, introductions, essays, poems, films, record jackets, reports, reviews, and interviews. Her first book, *Women, Resistance and Revolution: A History of Women and Revolution in the Modern World* (New York: Pantheon), created a major stir when first published in 1972. Her writing is a product of her own experience as a teacher of apprentices in continuing education (where she has taught hairdressers and typists), her efforts to organize night cleaners, of marching with coal miners and their wives, and of years of active engagement in the Trotskyist movement and in the world of left publications.

Vinay Bahl is the author of *The Making of the Indian Working Class: A Case Study of Tata Iron and Steel Co.* 1880-1946 (SAGE 1995). She is an Assistant professor of Sociology at the Pennsylvania College of Technology (Penn State) at Williamsport.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the later 1970s and the early I980s she helped organize a movement inspired by her pamphlet *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (Islington Community Press), published in 1979. Later it was published in book form in both America and Britain. The pamphlet acted as a springboard and inspired a small social movement that brought together people in traditional workers' organizations, the Leninist left, local community initiatives, women, gays, blacks, and youth. *Beyond the Fragments* groups appeared throughout England in the early eighties. These were not only political forums, but also social networks, part of people's everyday life and leisure, connected to looking after children, having fun, being active on the job and in the community. Sheila carried the politics of the *Beyond the Fragments* groups into the government itself. In 1982 she went to work for the Greater London Council (GLC), the then popularly elected governing body of the city of London in which the Labour left had a majority. It sought to mobilize people usually excluded by the formal political process, and to organize them in informal ways combining participatory democracy and representative government. She also edited *Jobs for Change*, a widely distributed photo magazine about economic policy and projects. Margaret Thatcher abolished the GLC in 1986, a sort of tribute to the success of its programs. After working for the GLC, Sheila has returned to supporting herself and her son by her writing. This has not been easy in the depressed political atmosphere of the late eighties and early nineties. She has never retreated into academia or become cynical about the power of working people. She lives both her scholarship and active left feminist politics, which has made her a true public intellectual.

I

Movements develop in the process of communicating themselves.... We have not even words for ourselves. Thinking is difficult when the words are not your own. Borrowed concepts are like passed down clothes, they fit badly and do not give confidence.... We walk and talk and think in living contradiction.[1]

Sheila Rowbotham wrote these lines in the context of feminists using male-centered language and concepts. But I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

find these lines also useful to explain my dilemma as a "Third World" woman using the English language, as well as using Western feminist concepts and categories. This dilemma started back in India, where the English language has long been a status symbol as well as a vehicle for social mobility. The position of the English language within India as well as in the world today is a tacit mark of the continuing vigor of Western imperialism. Thus I found that who I was for others, my "intelligence," indeed my essence, was a function of how well I had mastered the English language. Postmodernist notions of "difference" and "identity" offered not help but further obstacles, embedded as they are in a language impenetrable to any but a few.

These notions have been put to dubious use, as has the slogan of "multiculturalism." The notion of multiculturalism was interpreted as promotion of "differences" and separation among various ethnic and national groups within the United States as well as in the world at large. Such interpretation of the concept of "multiculturalism" came at a time when the Cold War was ending and large areas previously beyond the direct reach of the multinational companies (particularly the former "Eastern Bloc," but also India and to some degree China as well) were being ripped open for exploitation under the banner of "liberalization." The promotion of segregation of identities among various ethnic and national groups within these states led inevitably to political conflicts and to the weakening of potential resistance to imperialism. Such ethnic and nationality group conflicts in turn further ensured global domination by the First World in the name of "maintaining the peace" in the post-Cold War era.

It is in this historical context (and while reading Sheila Rowbotham) that I found myself thinking of building bridges among women, rather than promoting the idea of "differences" according to the prevailing fashion of academic and political discourse. But I am also aware that I shall be misunderstood if I claim to agree with Sheila without examining the relevance of the fact that she is a white British feminist and I am an Indian (problematic concept) "colored"woman. This threshold dilemma arises because postmodernism in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

academy does not allow me any other voice except standing against the West as "different." Indeed, I have generally found it very difficult to communicate with Western feminists (with a few exceptions of course) because when not feeling guilty for not "understanding" me, their predominant mode has been that of condescension. These experiences made me aware that I am supposed to remain comfortably "different" and alien in U.S. society or find support from the Indian community (which has its own oppressive mechanism to control their women, that I reject) for the rest of my life.

I cannot accept this imposed reality because if I have to constantly define myself in opposition to the constructs of "otherness" thrust on me, then that would be the surest way to "othering" myself. I am well aware that the moment one allows oneself to be subsumed within categories of "otherness" one automatically empowers what one is set against. What I seek instead is the creation of voices of dissent, of multiple points of attack and defense, sharply individuated yet linked.

Any theory, if it is to be of some practical use in the material world, must be capable not only of explaining material reality but also of providing a tool to act upon that reality. All of us know that today no country is formally a colony, but this does not mean that we are living in a post-colonial era. It only means that relations between First and Third World now take a more concealed form. We are well aware of the debt-dependency of Third World economies, of the no longer subtle means of control exercised by the World Bank and the IMF. It is in this wider context that the link between the micro-politics of the academy and the macro-politics of imperialism exists. Therefore, it becomes imperative that scholars both from First and Third Worlds should be aware of the ways in which their investigative and interpretive studies promote or serve the designs of imperialism. As scholars our concern should be to find the lived truth of specific human relationships in specific historical circumstances and not the theories of inevitable incomprehension, of convenient relativism, that now flourish in the Anglo-Saxon academy.

Therefore, in order to understand the issue of "differences" as promoted in the United States, and searching for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ways to live with respect, independence, and human dignity, I started asking the following question of myself: Why should I always see myself as "different" in U.S. society when I have become a typical part of the historical process of this country? Moreover, my arrival in the United States is not simply a personal decision on my part but also a product of a complex historical process of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism in which the histories of Britain, the United States, and India are intertwined. With this understanding of the historical process of the world capitalist system I do not see myself as "different" from Western women. Even when I dress differently, when I have a different cadence or accent in speech, or different aesthetic tastes and food habits, it does not make me more "different" in the United States than in India because both countries have a vast variety of people with a vast variety of tastes and languages. I know that I am not different as a human being from other human beings because we all need the same human rights, the same human care and the same basic things in life, and the same clean environment. That is why I refuse to be treated as "different."

II

Today, all of us (Third and First Worlds alike) experience the pressure of unrestrained global capitalism. In this perspective and context it seems illogical and unrealistic to interpret and analyze the experiences of people and societies as only a process of internal (therefore, different) conditions. Instead, we should try to understand the contemporary hegemonic powers and forces, their ideological and other mechanisms of control, and explore how they interact with different societies and how they shape peoples' views and consciousness. International feminist scholarship has begun the task of understanding the connections between First and Third World economies and their effect on the lives of women in all countries. This work is essential if links are to be forged between women's political struggles all over the world. The idea of creating bridges has caught up many women in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world in recent years, and Sheila's writings have been a contribution to that healthy trend.

The massive migration of ex-colonial populations to the industrial cities of Europe and the United States (due to the demand for cheap labor) has created new kinds of multiethnic and multiracial social formations. Keeping these new realities of the contemporary world in mind Sheila explains in her recent book *Homeworkers Worldwide* (London: Merlin Press, 1993) the growth "of a Third World within the First." She also highlights an important fact that "several organizing initiatives among Third World women workers outside the conventional situation of highly organized western trade unionists have challenged the fatalism which assumed that poor women were not organizable."[2] She correctly saw the home workers phenomenon in Britain and in India as a product of a global process of capitalist relations and not a problem of women of the "Third World" separately. Soon the homeworkers themselves began to make global links. This process raises the hope of a new kind of labor movement which is a contribution to a new kind of internationalism. Moreover, these women homeworkers are not just Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Filipina but also include white women. "Homeworking groups in Britain and Holland now are lobbying the EEC to recognize homeworkers' conditions and make legislation in the different European countries more similar."[3] These new types of associations have shown the capacity to cross over the boundaries of production and reproduction, of labor and community, of the economic and social. The account in this book urges women of the West to learn from the experiences of Third World poor women who are resisting the exploitation of the multinational corporations. She notes that homeworkers organizations have had an important international role in Europe and Canada as well as in the Third World, where organization of casual workers is emerging in countries like the Philippines. "Synthesizing old and new forms of organizing will be the work of the future—that future whose outline we can as yet barely discern."[4]

While pointing both at the international links between women's movements and the interaction of ideas, Sheila Row-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

botham also brings to our attention that the development of ideas itself is an integral part of the movements. One cannot develop without the other. The relationship between collective action and women's emancipation is of special significance because a lone voice claiming liberation is no threat. Sheila is aware that none of us can know exactly how new struggles will emerge, what interpretations will be given to women's movements, or what ultimate form they will take. Women join collective actions for different reasons at different times and places. Many women have participated in social protest action due to historical reasons particular to their own situation, and not simply in response to ideas taken from the outside. In this process of struggle each group of women developed their own strategies, and their own interpretations of the questions of equality. Moreover, all women do not use the demand of equality in the same way. In many cases "women demand peace sometimes as 'mothers,' sometimes as 'human beings.'"[5] The process of liberation is obscured when mothers can be at once revered and marginalized as happened in the mobilization of women in nationalist and sometimes in socialist movements. These various factors that color women's actions and the nature of their demands is a reason why many women's movements are not revolutionary as normally understood. It is a continuous and central insight of the work of Sheila Rowbotham that even when these womens' movements are not revolutionary, the demands they make require such a fundamental change in society that they are completely inconceivable without revolution.

Sheila Rowbotham's work emphasizes the relationship between the making of feminist theory and women's life experiences, because theories evolve in the process of interaction between these two. It means there cannot be one theory only or any universal model for women's movements to follow. "Thought of a social movement is not packaged neatly between two covers.... Anyone who has been an active participant in politics knows people do not sit solemnly reading a book and then march off to make strategies and programmes."[6] Earlier, Sheila wrote on this issue that every new movement assumes a different shape and in the process women's move-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ments all over the world look as if "thousands and thousands of women were busy making a gigantic garment in which they all borrow themes from one another but create their own patterns."[7]

These specific "patterns" in women's movements emerge due to the specific social, cultural, political and economic conditions of the countries where these women live in a particular historical time. For example, modern inventions in information technology have been used to create a large pool of women workers in the developing countries. This is a phenomenon that cannot be understood at a journalistic glance, but requires study. Each region is incorporated in the global economic network as a specific component of the international division of labor. Sheila Rowbotham and the Indian scholar Swasti Mitter have explored this phenomenon in the recent anthology they edited, *Women Encounter Technology: Changing Patterns of Employment in the Third World* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995). In raising the issue of the impact of technology the editors are able to challenge the existing definition of the term "Third World" as including only the underdeveloped nations. These studies include as subjects non-affluent communities and nations and immigrant groups residing in technologically and economically developed nations as well, while continuing to use the term "Third World." This strategy allows the possibility of an alternative perspective that links the struggles of poor people from different regions of the world, in the context of the links that integrate their regions in global capitalism.

Various accounts in this volume show that a consequence of urban employment in the new technology is to give women social power and control (albeit contested) over their fertility. This is an instance where the contest itself is proof of a progressive change. Most of all, women all over the world are able to become aware of their connection with one another by means of the same information technology. The editors urge that women need to use this awareness of their connection with other women in the world to share experiences and to collect data about common problems and issues. For instance, very little is known about the effects of new

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

technologies on the health of women workers. Most of the concerned governments give priority to the question of creating jobs and economic growth, but little or no attention to the issue of the health hazards in the new work environment.

Postmodernist discourse has tended to be an obstacle to taking up the research that might best serve to promote internationalism in matters of women's economic empowerment. The editors write that "in our current intellectual climate, women of the Third World have become the subject of research in connection with the 'other.' It is the 'differences' rather than the issues of economic liberation that has assumed a central position in academic analysis."[8] Postmodernist discourse of "Eurocentric bias" has had the odd result of discouraging the interest of women academics in the developing world in research that deals with the life and work of women with different heritages than their own. The work in this collection explains that this trend coincided with the ascendant ideologies of the 1980s which fetishize the market mechanism and glorify self help and individual entrepreneurship. In such an atmosphere people will readily shun collective responsibility for vulnerable or marginal groups even within the boundaries of their own nation, let alone beyond the boundaries (cultural or political) of their own community. The problem is compounded by those Ecofeminists who consider research on new technology and its impact on women to be irrelevant and unproductive. According to such Ecofeminists, technology itself incorporates and reproduces values harmful to the poor people of the world. With logical consistency but little sense, they promote the goal of the subsistence economy. This entire volume argues that appeals for subsistence economy are a diversion from the central question of how to alter the material conditions that determine relations of power both nationally and internationally.

The editors argue persuasively that both postmodernist and Ecofeminist approaches lead to the erosion of any belief in the power of collective action, of course without in any way diminishing the rate of feminist publications. One can find "shelves and shelves of poetry and fiction, books about sexuality, about race, about health, about housing, about violence,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about psychology." But the very few books that attempt to put these concerns in the context of women's changing economic relation with technology are "heavily outnumber[ed] by 'how to' books about computing."[9] It seems that feminist attention has shifted away from the previously central concern of women's economic place in the system and of women's work, both paid and unpaid. This change in the focus of feminist academic attention is linked to a radical shift of emphasis from the collective to the individual. Rowbotham and Mitter point out that the "language of 'difference,' and antimodernity ironically gives the politics of exclusiveness and Eurocentrism a new lease of life." The feminist critique of the Enlightenment devalues the different needs of women of non-European origins which are best expressed in precisely those same despised universal Enlightenment values of equality, reason, and autonomy.

Sheila Rowbotham has taken pains to remind us that "women studies after all had its origin not only in the desire to extend what was studied but to transform the power relationship in how knowledge was constructed and communicated."[10] To this end our attention must focus on the question of organization for collective action. Rowbotham and Mitter have developed their ideas on the process of organization and collective action in a second recent collection entitled *Dignity and Daily Bread: New Forms of Economic Organizing Among Poor Women in the Third World and the First* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994). This book is a valuable effort to open as an area of inquiry the new kinds of organizing emerging among poor women around questions directly concerned with the process of production. But the actions and consciousness of poor women workers of the Third World, generally unable to use traditional methods of labor organizing in the teeth of fiercely repressive local regimes, cannot satisfactorily be explained under narrow and constricted definitions of class consciousness and resistance. These workers are creating novel democratic organizing processes in the most varied contexts in the poor countries, with consequences in the Western countries as well. The accounts in the book reveal the true interconnection of class with gender and race by insisting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the basic Marxist notion of situating work and class centrally within social existence as a whole, while also subverting the assumption that new cultural forms and their theorizing originate only in the North. Again by including studies spanning both Third and First Worlds, the editors are able to challenge the prevailing separation between studies focused on "women and development" issues in the Third World and work done on the economic and social circumstances of class, gender, race, and ethnicity in the First World.

This division of scholarly inquiry obscures the importance of multinational capital, which does not fail to exercise influence over "women's studies" in line with its influence in society more generally. We are then diverted from the task of finding patterns in the multiple forms of global events affecting women. Our problem is that these patterns are complex, variable, and far from readily predictable in their development. Instead of giving up efforts to find commonalities amongst working women, our aim must be to understand these complex patterns by starting with inquiry into what is happening. This is the only way we can assess the odds which are stacked against poor working women. For example, one can find patterns in the history of nineteenth century textile mill women workers in Britain and the United States, and in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japan, which are parallel with conditions within the modern Free Trade Zone (FTZ) found in the Third World. For instance, the employers in all these cases sought influence over the attitudes of the new mostly female work force through providing accommodation. The historical study of these lodging houses showed interesting unintended effects when women by sharing living space with other women were also able to share their experiences at the workplace as well, and derive strength from one another, which frequently, developed into militant consciousness. The study of women's current parallel experience in the FTZs is the type of task that Rowbotham and Mitter rightly demand be taken up by the feminist scholarship of today.

The studies collected by Rowbotham and Mitter, and Sheila's own recent work, document the emergence of new kinds of social and economic democratic practices among the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poor women of the world as their labor power is commodified. In this process, so deserving of our attention, the poor women of the Third World are demanding a very basic and minimum human need—dignity and daily bread. "These women who labor for such small [basic] rewards present us a tremendous human challenge [one that] compels us to ask the following questions: What kind of development? What kind of growth? What kind of society can ensure that these basic aspirations are met?"[11] Can we find answers to such basic questions of dignity and daily bread by postmodernism's appeals to 'differences' and cultural relativism? Rather, the recent work of Sheila Rowbotham is a continuing demonstration by one admirable woman of a unity of practice and theory *in practice* that is a model to all, worldwide.

NOTES

1. Sheila Rowbotham, *Women's liberation and New Politics*, Pamphlet n. 17, (London: May Day Manifesto Group, 1971) pp. 5, 10.
2. Sheila Rowbotham, *Homeworkers Worldwide* (London: Merlin, 1993), p. 2
3. Ibid., p. 84.
4. Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter eds., *Dignity and Daily Bread* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 11.
5. Sheila Rowbotham, *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 296-297.
6. Ibid., p. 306.
7. Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. xii-xiv.
8. Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter eds., *Women Encounter Technology: Changing Patterns of Employment in the Third World* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 14.
9. Ibid., p. 15.
10. Ibid., p. 343.
11. *Dignity and Daily Bread: New Forms of Economic Organizing Among Poor Women in the Third World and the First*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

Honest, Able and Fearless

by John Mage

Victor Rabinowitz, Unrepentant Leftist, A Lawyer's Memoir. (Urbana; and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996) 352 pp. $29.95 cloth.

Among the questions that divide my friends is whether it is possible that widespread revolutionary organization may someday occur even in the United States, the Belly of the Beast as goes a phrase all my fellow 68ers will recall. If you think the question deserves to be asked, then the history of the repression of the U.S. Left after the Second World War (and of what survived the storm) is worth your attention. After all, if this history is forgotten then the question is indeed not worth asking. How the ruling class of the United States manages its domestic repression is, in any event, of general relevance in many other places as well. Victor Rabinowitz at age eighty five offers a sharp, fascinating, and superbly written report on this question from inside that structured but flexible Great Intestine of the United States, its legal system.

What has come to be remembered as the McCarthy epoch shattered the U.S. Communist party and maimed when it did not destroy all militant and progressive U.S. labor unions. The fragments that survived helped to shape the struggle for civil rights, the ongoing attempts to come to the aid of those resisting U.S. imperialism in Latin America and especially the Cubans, and the great mass resistance to the war in Vietnam. The clients of Victor Rabinowitz and Leonard Boudin were participants in the key events of all phases of this history, whose logic (as they would have said)

John Mage is a close associate of *Monthly Review.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

landed them in Court. The immediate result was, for these clients, relief and gratitude that Victor and Leonard were there. A more lasting result is the body of reported cases where counsel is listed as the firm Rabinowitz Boudin.[1] These cases taken together would be a pretty thorough and continuing history of political struggle and repression in the United States over the past fifty years. It is a record unmatched by any other law firm in the country; there isn't even a close second. But this is merely a lesser and legal sort of immortality. Lesser, because the collection of cases read in sequence would not only be incomprehensible to non-lawyers, but in the largest part would consist of inaccurate factual accounts and worse reasoning by at best conventional and often stupid judges. *Unrepentant Leftist: A Lawyer's Memoir*, a clear account of this story from Victor's perspective, amounts therefore to a public service. No serious student of U.S. social and legal history of the second half of the twentieth century can henceforth ignore this book, and no activist concerned with the questions of practice and theory will be other than glad to have read it.

The book divides in thirds. The first third brings Victor up to the start of the Cold War. Here he is an historian, selecting with skill the events best suited to tell a history in which his own youthful participation is not at the heart of the story. The tale of the American Communications Association, a militant CIO union led by Communists, I particularly enjoyed. Victor recalls an era long gone, when a trades union of telegraphers on strike could bring the New York Stock Exchange almost to a halt, and the Mayor of New York (the complex figure of Bill O'Dwyer) could refuse to come to the employers' aid. The reason is a second good story, that of the American Labor Party ("ALP"), the only third party in New York City in the last three quarters of the 20th century able to elect Congressmen and City Councilmen in its own right. The ALP was, in this epoch, the only significant political voice in New York City free of corruption and corporate real estate influence, and O'Dwyer owed his election as Mayor to its support. Victor, who was briefly its Brooklyn organization chairman, describes the ALP at its moment of hope before the night of repression set in. Those who today would build an honest third party in the United States must think back on the ALP and remember with due respect its leading figure, Vito Marcantonio, the outstanding New York Left politician of our times.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The middle third of the book is its essence. It vividly tells the story of the suspension of the right of freedom of speech and subsequent repression of the U.S. Left. This is no ordinary history, but recalls Walter Benjamin's injunction (*Theses on the Philosophy of History, VI*) that "[t]o articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."

When the storm of state repression hit the U.S. Communist party at the end of the Second World War, Victor Rabinowitz was a labor lawyer in his mid thirties. Relatively privileged (University of Michigan, B.A. 1931, LL.B. 1934), son of a factory owner, he had joined the Communist party during the Second World War knowing full well that henceforth the *cursus honorum* leading to judicial position was barred. Indeed, no sooner had he joined the CPUSA than the leader of the Brooklyn Democratic party, ignorant of that fact, offered him a place on the bench to lure him away from the ALP. Victor notes that the candidates of the Brooklyn Democratic party were with multiple falsity described in the election posters of the day as "Honest, Able and Fearless." But he had already chosen something else.

For those who need or expect an explanation for his joining the Communist party, Victor instead presents the main threads of his life at the time. He found that in the New York City of the 1930s, if he wanted to act to change an unjust world in adherence to the moral values of his family and milieu, he was of necessity in the company of Communists. He also made a fundamental practical choice that very few of his class even considered. At this deep level in Victor's account of his life there is a real modesty worthy of love. At the more superficial levels Victor doesn't waste time on modesty. He knows he is telling a rousing story of defense against the beast, a story of survival, resistance and reflection in which he played a highly creditable role.

To give meaning to notions of milieu and values, consider what Victor's life would have likely been, things being otherwise equal, had his father decided at the age of sixteen to stay in Rossein (Raseinai), a town some miles north of the city of Kovno (Kaunas) in Lithuania, rather than come to New York City. Victor would have been thirty years old in the summer of 1941 when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, and dead before he was thirty one. If not among the hundreds of Jewish men picked off the streets and beaten to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

death with tire irons and clubs by Lithuanian nationalists in a downtown Kovno garage before the Nazis had even fully arrived, then he would probably have been among the Jewish intellectuals murdered by the same Lithuanian nationalists shortly thereafter at the Ninth Fort above Slobutka, or if wounded or otherwise captured by the Wehrmacht then murdered at the command of a German officer carrying out the "Commissar Order." You see, from the point of view of this other Victor the fundamental choices of the real Victor are clear. And the perspective of that hypothetical Victor is the place from which the twentieth century is best observed and from where we must act even today.

But Victor Rabinowitz was born in Brooklyn, and the United States Courthouse on Foley Square in Manhattan is not the Ninth Fort. In the U.S. system all significant political and social questions are given legal form. This has proved effective for its rulers, not least by limiting in advance the types of permissible answers. Thus, when domestic repression began to strike the Left in the United States after the Second World War it immediately brought lawyers to the center of the struggle. This is an omen of retreat, but the stories of retreat that permit later advances are, at least for strategy buffs, the most interesting.

It's clear that the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States ("Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances") prohibited the Congress from outlawing a political party for its political speech, jailing its leaders and activists, driving its members from all employment in schools, newspapers, the entertainment industry, and labor unions, and jailing others for contempt if they refused to say if they had ever belonged to the outlawed organization or refused to inform on their comrades. The problem for lawyers and judges if the U.S. state must do these things, and must do so *lawfully* (and do so it would), is called "distinguishing" as in "distinguishing the First Amendment." In legal usage "to distinguish" means to show that a recognized authority is inapplicable on the given facts.[2] The first cases, assigned as luck perhaps had it (I share with Victor some skepticism as to the purportedly neutral procedures used for the assignment of judges in the United States courts) to the most reactionary judges, produced quick convictions upheld in marvelously evasive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and dishonest opinions by the Courts of Appeal. But the U. S. Supreme Court, which generally is not obliged to hear any case it does not choose to hear, avoided the dramatic political issue and refused to accept such cases for review. They naturally wished to delay having to face the humiliation that raw political reality on occasion produces among our judges.

In 1949 there was a class of cases the Supremes could not formally refuse to hear, appeals from special three judge courts convened to pass on challenges to the constitutionality of provisions of a statute. The infamous Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 contained a provision, section 9(h), aimed at prohibiting Communists (broadly defined) from holding office in unions. The American Communications Association ("ACA"), represented by Victor, was an immediate target. Victor's First Amendment challenge to 9(h) was rejected by the three judge court (one judge dissenting). This was then, in 1949, the first case where the Supreme Court had to face squarely the question of whether the First Amendment barred the anti-communist witch hunts. The resulting opinions in *ACA* v. *Douds* were a grotesque slice of legal history when I was in law school less than twenty years later, and today must read as if written for *In Re Giordano Bruno* (Vatican Ct. of Appeals, 1600). Justice Jackson explained, for the benefit of any lower court judges yet uncertain and uneasy, that the First Amendment did not apply to traitors, witches, heretics, vampires, and Communists. Now for Victor this was real life and his first Federal appellate argument. Reading the opinion must have felt like being in a rapidly oscillating house in an earthquake.[3]

The nationwide hysteria mounted year by year with the leadership of the Communist party jailed, and thousands on thousands hounded from their jobs, until it climaxed in the 1953 burning of the Rosenbergs in a judicial auto-da-fé against the background of the macabre media carnival of Senator McCarthy's fascinating inquisitorial hearings. Through the rest of the 1950s the witch hunts continued but with ever decreasing force, until the last flutter was put to rest in the Supreme Court's opinion in the *Yellin* case in 1963. *Yellin* was also argued by Victor Rabinowitz. He had been there from the beginning of the storm until its end, and as a lawyer he assesses the role of the judiciary during the Great American Holy and Patriotic Inquisition: "the courts were of no help whatsoever."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At the height of these strange proceedings, fate required that poor Victor have upclose and personal dealings with Joe McCarthy and Roy Cohn (prosecutor of the Rosenbergs and Chief Counsel to McCarthy's committee). He gives a nuanced view of McCarthy as cruel in his role but "off camera" a "not unpleasant man, a good-natured drunk." But he is far too lenient in regard to Cohn. His description ("Of all the evil men I've encountered in six decades of law practice...the most vicious") errs in its excess of charity. Cohn, who died of AIDS in 1986 after years of knowingly infecting the unwitting boys he paid to sodomize him, was a locus of loathsome disease. I don't mean AIDS, having AIDS was the healthiest thing about Roy Cohn in his entire adult life.

The final third of *Unrepentant Leftist* is most recognizably a memoir. Here one gets a hint of the tensions, sorrows, and pleasures in the main relationships in Victor's life: with his late partner Leonard Boudin and the lawyers of the next generation who have inherited the firm (Michael Krinsky and Eric Lieberman), and in Victor's own immediate families of which there are two (in sequence, of course). Victor develops, with obvious pleasure, two themes from his life in the period after the end of the McCarthy era: how he and Leonard Boudin represented revolutionary Cuba in the U.S. courts; and the role he played in steering the U.S. Left lawyers' organization, the National Lawyers Guild, through the generational passage of the 1960s.

The account Victor relates of how he and Leonard Boudin pursued and won, in 1960, the legal representation of revolutionary Cuba is more in the style of picaresque eighteenth century autobiography (say Casanova, or Victor's fellow Litvak Salomon Maimon) than that of the staid Wall Street "My Life in the Law" variety. This was a client they needed, wanted, lusted after, had to have. And seduced, entreated, and finally won. And in retrospect, I cannot imagine that any other firm could have done a better job. Sitting next to known Communists in front of McCarthy and Cohn was better preparation for representing Cuba in the U.S. courts than a lifetime of the practice of international law. And Victor is (as always) candid in stating that at the time neither he nor Leonard Boudin knew a thing of international law. First among the many virtues of this book is Victor's skill in cutting through the web of mystification that is legal discourse to tell the story. It is also his genius as a lawyer. Nowhere is this more precious a skill than in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

regard to international law which, in the U.S. legal system, exists only in a wondrous abstract form both hollow and hidden.

To explain, international law's necessary premise is that in it "no single sovereign reigns supreme," in the words of an honorable Nicaragua opinion by a major U.S. court in 1985.[4]

Put technically, this means that the courts of no nation can determine for itself what is required by international law, but in this and other regards must respect the existence of other not inferior jurisdictions not only in the heavens above but also down here among us humans. Consequently international law in U.S. courts is both hollow and hidden. Hollow because the imperial aspect of U.S. reality permits no body of U.S. law to develop in accordance with this fundamental and constitutive principle. Hidden because there is strong enough resistance around the world to U.S. pretensions as to require a body of U.S. law to develop *distinguishing* international law. By a recognizably dialectical necessity the body of distinguishing cases secretes in the law of the United States the real but negative presence of the resistance to U.S. imperialism around the world, in this account in the form of (always inapplicable to the case at hand) "international law." Fear not, this is not Victor's version. He *never* talks this way.

The moment in our times when the Supreme Court came closest to recognizing the fundamental premise of international law was in the 1964 *Sabbatino* case. Victor argued the case for Cuba. *Sabbatino* holds that the rule that U.S. courts will not sit in judgment on the acts of the government of another country done within its own territory (the "act of state doctrine") is part of U.S. law *and* that it applied to an expropriation of U.S. owned property in Cuba. It is not insignificant that this victory for international law came at that moment of more than judicial caution that followed the closest approach to nuclear confrontation in history, the Cuban missile crisis. But Sabbatino is more than that, it exists in our law today in the manner of all authentic elements of international law. It must still be *distinguished.*

Almost all the organizations in which members of the Communist party took a leading role in the 1930s and 1940s were purged and/or destroyed. By the late 1960s, there were left some (not large) labor unions and the National Lawyers Guild. Victor Rabinowitz, reflecting on the achievements of a distinguished career, places first his role in preserving the National Lawyers Guild. It is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

today an effective nationwide organization, many thousand strong, committed to the goal of radical social change. It is an important exception to the prevailing rule, and Victor's pride is justified.

Victor's credible account is that the community of 1930s lawyers in and close to the CPUSA preserved this organizational treasure, more or less intact, through the great storm in order to hand it over to their 1968er successors. The succession was not handled gracefully by either side, but it took place. The lack of grace is understandable when you consider how unprecedented was the transition; the transfer of power from fathers to daughters.

Victor places the transition as beginning in 1967, when he was President of the Guild, and culminating in the memorable electrically tense Boulder, Colorado convention of the National Lawyers Guild of the summer of 1971. In August of 1971 many of the best of the youth movement against the Vietnam War had just gone underground (the "Weathermen"). Bernardine Dohrn, leader of Weatherman, in 1967 had been hired by the national office of the Guild as a student organizer. Many of us at Boulder had been brought into the Guild by Bernardine and none would dispute Victor's characterization of her as "brilliant" and with "inexhaustible energy." As he says, "in her travels around the country she spent half her time organizing antiwar demonstrations and the other half organizing Guild chapters to defend the demonstrators." The tensions that erupted at Boulder were generational, but also of gender, of theory and practice, and about tactics and strategy, or "professionalism," or white guilt, or drugs and sex and rock-and-roll. Victor is today the leading historian of these events and accurately (here I am a witness) tells the story of how the Guild survived. This was in largest part due to the practical wisdom shown by the late Martin Popper(my partner, mentor, and comrade), Doris Brin Walker, Victor Rabinowitz himself, and a few other leaders of the generation that had braved the McCarthyite storm. But here however it is clear that Victor's account will be superseded and most likely by that of a woman from among the 68ers, if internal consistency counts for anything among lawyers. The daughters and heirs' perspective is likely to be a bit different from Victor's, and the heirs' take on things usually prevails for reasons both good and bad. Victor also recounts the events, insofar as he was involved in them, that led to the sentencing of Kathy Boudin (Leonard's daughter) to twenty years to life for a politically motivated offense

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

committed in 1981. Here the reviewer must declare his Saint-Simonian faith that, in general and in particular, to get the account of our times most fit to act upon we must Await the Woman.[5]

The reader must also be warned that this reviewer is subject to a passion many might consider warped or queer, what Havelock Ellis might have called *gerontophilia rosacea.* That is, I have this thing for old unrepentant Reds. There is something about that handful of octogenarian men and women I cannot resist. If it has biased my judgment, so be it. I can do no other. On the best authority (that of Lytton Strachey) it is supposed to be harder to write a good life than to lead one. Victor's achievement is then truly on several levels at once.

NOTES

1. This is how I was taught to refer to the firm in my youth. Properly called today it is Rabinowitz Boudin Standard Krinsky and Lieberman, respected and able counsel for, among other clients, Cuba. Victor Rabinowitz is now "of counsel" to the firm, and has "little connection with the cases in the office." For some years in the early 1990s I was honored to be "of counsel" to the firm.
2. When the authority obviously does apply (as in this case) the point of the judicial exercise is to find the most adequate substitute for the italicized part of the argument "everything you say is well and good, *but there is no alternative.*" The task of defense lawyer or critic faced with this brutal situation is to shine so bright a light on the theory/practice conflict that, with good fortune, an instructive and telling weakness in the structure of the dominant ideology may be suddenly illuminated. This point has been developed by Roy Bhaskar in his *Dialectics* (London; and New York: Verso, 1993), pp. 116-119, and elsewhere.
3. Recently the novelist Howard Fast, in his memoir *Being Red,* abused the lawyer (whom I know and respect) who had represented him when Fast relied upon the First Amendment in refusing to comply with the inquisitorial demands. Fast was one of the first defendants indicted in the Cold War witch hunts. He went to jail after the First Amendment was finally distinguished as "inapplicable." Fast complains with venom that he should have been made to rely upon the Fifth Amendment's privilege against self-incrimination. As Victor's account makes clear, it would have been contemptible to have pressured a client to fall back on that position before there were convincing evidences that the courts of the United States would refuse to observe the vaunted Constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and assembly. Fast presents the odd spectacle of the public advocate of revolutionary activity demanding that in his own case his lawyer cease resisting before the fight begins.
4. *De Sanchez* v. *Banco Central de Nicaragua,* 770 F.2d 1385, 1398 (5th Cir., 1985).
5. Only, of course, if she gives a recognizably Marxist account. It is analytic to Saint-Simonienne religion that progress occurs in our times and that therefore today we know things unknown in November, 1831.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Walter Reuther, "Social Unionist"

by Martin Glaberman

Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995) $35.00 cloth, 575 pp.

A *New York Times* obituary for Sophie Reuther on February 23, 1996, declared her husband, Victor, a co-founder of the United Auto Workers. So now the myth that Walter Reuther founded the UAW is extended to include his brother. Unfortunately, the new biography of Walter Reuther by Nelson Lichtenstein will do very little to squelch the myth; this despite the fact that the book documents Reuther's career, warts and all.

Let's begin with the title. "The most dangerous man in Detroit" is a quote from George Rodney when he was head of the Automobile Manufacturers' Association and his main job was to fight the propaganda wars against the union. The statement was pure fiction. Much closer to the truth was an editorial in the reactionary *Detroit News*, published on Reuther's death. *The News*, which had fought Reuther throughout his career, was concerned that the union might not find a new president who was as effective as Reuther in controlling and disciplining rank and file auto workers.

The book is full of self-serving quotations from Reuther and others that are accepted at face value. There is a very superficial understanding of the auto industry, of life in the union and on the shop floor, and of the left. The huge number of quotations and

Martin Glaberman is professor Emeritus of Social Science at the College of Lifelong Learning of Wayne State University in Detroit.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

citations tends to conceal a high degree of inaccuracy and misunderstanding. He lumps the socialist Upton Sinclair with Huey Long and Father Coughlin as "corporate radical." (p. 113) He calls C.L.R. James a Trotskyist long after he broke with Trotskyism. (p. 434) When the facts are hard to dispute, he invents facts. For example, after documenting Reuther's support of the right-wing hawks in the Democratic Party during the Vietmam War, he invents Reuther's "dovish instincts" (p.404) as a counterweight.

An interesting example of Lichtensteins's style is how he treats the controversy about whether Reuther was ever a member of the Communist Party. He cites the sources, but can't bring himself to say that Reuther was a member. He says he "may" have been (p. 54) or refers to a "possible brief membership." (p. 55) In fact Reuther *was* a member of the CP (for less than a year). Nat Ganley, a leading CP militant in the UAW—commenting on a book manuscript to his comrades at International Publishers—said he was a member. "I collected his dues." But he recommends that that fact be deleted from the book—which it was. The book was *Brother Bill McKie*, the biography of an important CP organizer at the Rouge plant. When I discovered this in Ganley's papers in the Wayne State University Labor Archives, I reported it in a small article. At the time, I didn't think it was all that significant, but I have since modified that view. My experience in getting it published was at least as interesting as the facts themselves. *Labor History*, the liberal, pro-labor academic journal, refused to publish it on the grounds that it was terrible news, "if true," and they could get sued! This was in the 1970s about something Ganley had written in the 1950s about a relatively brief event in the 1930s. Who in the world was going to sue? Ultimately the piece was published in *Radical America*.[1] After its publication I learned that Ganley's widow, Ann Ganley, had tried to steal the documentary evidence from the Archives. In fact, she did steal it—but I had made photocopies of the material and was able to restore it to the Archives at their request.

I can understand the concern of both the friends and enemies of Reuther about publishing that information. In the 1950s Reuther swore before a Congressional committee that he had never been a member of the CP, apparently sure that his former comrades would not betray him. He, of course, did not return the courtesy.

Lichtenstein distorts one of the most crucial events in the great GM Flint sitdown strike, the taking of Chevrolet Plant 4. As

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he describes it, Genora Johnson took the plan of her husband, Kermit Johnson, to the SP caucus, where it won support despite Reuther's opposition. To begin with, the plan originated with workers in the plant (for whom Lichtenstein, like Reuther, displays contempt). Kermit brought the plan to the SP caucus. Lichtenstein ignores why it became the crucial turning point in the strike. The shutting down of the great Fisher Body Plant 1 stopped Buick production, although the Buick complex was not struck. But the occupation of the smaller Fisher Body Plant 2 did not stop Chevrolet production because Chevys were still being assembled in other parts of the United States. The strike had reached an impasse. The state had tightened military controls and there was no sign of a breakthrough. Plant 4 was the only Chevy motor plant in the country. So long as it worked, motors were being shipped and Chevys were being assembled and sold. The taking of Plant 4 put a stop to the production of GM's mass market money maker. Shortly afterwards the company sued for peace.

Involved in Lichtenstein's failure to note the importance of this action is his tendency to exaggerate the ability of GM and the other auto corporations to use their financial and industrial weight to short circuit labor militancy. He reports that GM has, since the Flint strike, provided double and triple sources for crucial components. The limitations of that policy should have been evident to anyone writing in 1995 when small strikes at GM and at Chrysler shut down substantial proportions of corporate production. Aided by the so-called "just in time" method of production, a few thousand workers making brake parts in Dayton, Ohio, have brought virtually all of GM's North American car and truck production to a halt. But Lichtenstein will probably still keep looking for reasons why worker militancy doesn't work.

Lichtenstein reports that after Reuther became UAW president he "beefed up the union's Engineering Department, where Robert Kanter...taught autoworkers time-study techniques with which to counter company foremen and engineers." (p. 289) When I was a committeeman at the Detroit Fruehauf Trailer Co. plant we learned never to call in the union time-study people. Lichtenstein seems to think that the problem with time study was company cheating. The problem with time study is that it sucks every free second out of the worker's life. The union time study man would invariably confirm the company time study. When local people

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

complained, the union administration would tell them that they should have known better than to allow the time study in the first place-this in a period when the shop floor power of workers were being eroded by growing bureaucratization.

This is one of Lichtenstein's major points. "As Reuther put it in the summer of 1937, after the issue of wildcat strikes at GM had embroiled the union leadership in bitter controversy: 'We want a disciplined organization. We believe that in a union, as in an army, discipline is of first rate importance. There can be no question of that whatsoever.'" (p.11) The book documents the erosion of steward systems and their replacement by the more bureaucratic system of full-time committeemen, with officers in the factory, distant from the workers they represented. The binding concept of the Reuther administration in power was Unity in the Leadership, Solidarity in the Ranks. It was a concept that did not brook dissidence or rank and file militancy. It led to the creation of what Frank Marquart, a Reuther loyalist until he died, but one who didn't lose his objectivity, called "one-party government." Lichtenstein is defensive about this. "In the postwar era all the big trade unions were one-party regimes, none more so than the industrial unions that bargained with the firms in America's oligopolistically structured industries. But Reuther could never rule by fiat alone." (p. 303) What is that supposed to mean? No dictator rules by flat alone!

An example of fiat: Reuther ordered an administrator put over at Flint's Chevy Local 695—the crime: the local's newspaper published a list, without comment, of all the grievances rejected by local management, referred to the union's appeals committee and left to lie dormant. This is one of the reasons for the widespread hostility to Reuther in Flint, the heart of the GM empire. Lichtenstein attributes this to factionalism. It goes much deeper. Sometime around 1950 Kermit Johnson, who by then had been blacklisted by GM but kept his ties to his old local, invited my wife to accompany him to a meeting of Local 659 at which Reuther was supposed to speak. About half way through the meeting Kermit walked to the front of the hall, faced the audience with his back to Reuther, and began to lead everyone in the singing of Solidarity. Furious at being drowned out, Reuther left the meeting and never returned to speak in Flint again. For a stunt such as that to be possible, a lot more than factional differences had to be involved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What is involved at bottom is what Lichtenstein admires as "workplace jurisprudence," designed to replace what he calls the parochialism of worker militancy. He has different catchy names for what went on such as the "Faustian Bargain" and the "Treaty of Detroit." On the one hand it replaces worker power on the shop floor with "jurisprudence." Lichtenstein is surprised when, just as Reuther won Supplemental Unemployment Benefits, workers at Ford and GM went out on wildcat strikes instead of celebrating Reuther's victory. What they were striking about were the thousands of unresolved grievances at single plants after termination of the contract. Not won, not lost, left in limbo. Lichtenstein thinks that worker grievances are parochial. Of course, a single grievance is usually parochial. But a thousand grievances? Not quite the same.

Why couldn't shop floor jurisprudence settle grievances? Because it wasn't supposed to. It begins with the Wagner Act, the so-called Magna Carta of labor. It was a response to the radical working class victories of 1934, a socialist-led strike at Toledo Auto-Lite, a Trotskyist-led strike of Teamsters in Minneapolis-St. Paul, a Communist-led strike on the San Francisco waterfront. In addition there was the massive Communist-led textile workers strike which was defeated. The Wagner Act was the beginning of the legal system designed to take power out of the hands of workers and place it in the hands of committeemen, lawyers, and judges. In subsequent years, with Taft-Hartley, Landrum-Griffin etc. it got worse. It became the basis for the social compact, the exchange of money and fringe benefits for a disciplined working class. As C.L.R. James put it, "The bureaucracy inevitably must substitute the struggle over consumption, higher wages, pensions, education, etc. for a struggle in production. This is the basis of the welfare state, the attempt to appease the workers with the fruits of labor when they seek satisfaction in the work itself."[2] The problem, however, is that this involves a contradiction. The only reason that the bourgeoisie has to accept this deal is a militant working class. But if the union bureaucracy devotes itself to stifling the militancy, or if an extended period of high levels of unemployment makes that militancy risky, or as a consequence, right-wing anti-labor governments begin to undercut the basis of the social compact; what is left? What Reuther left the UAW? Lichtenstein thinks that Reuther left the labor movement a legacy that could be the basis for a revival. Reuther's legacy (although surely not just his) is the "give it up before they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

take it away" theory of struggle. If you don't want to depend on the workers, then you must depend on the state. You must tie yourself to the best deal you can get from a bourgeois party. And then wonder why the workers don't follow.

Currently there is a lot of discussion about the need to leave business unionism and return to social unionism. What tends to be forgotten was that Walter Reuther was the social unionist par excellence. He always had a plan. He always got involved in social issues outside of narrow union concerns. But it was all rhetoric. He could not deliver. Case in point: the question of race, which so pleases the reviewers of this book.

The powers of self-deception are enormous. Lichtenstein documents Reuther's history as a consistent defender of what we would call institutional racism. He fought against adding blacks to the UAW Executive Board. He was one of the first to use what is generally acknowledged as the racist term, "reverse discrimination." He marched in civil rights demonstrations and gave union money to the appropriate organizations. He functioned as a representative of the Kennedy and L.B. Johnson administrations whose main activity was to limit militancy as much as possible. What neither Lichtenstein nor anyone else seems to notice is that where Reuther had the power in his own union, he did nothing to end job discrimination and segregation. What was done was done by civil rights movements winning anti-discrimination legislation. Lichtenstein, like a lot of others, blames the rank and file. That, too, is a myth that needs to be destroyed. The rank and file didn't hire union staff. The rank and file didn't pick administration caucus candidates. I hope this is not the kind of social unionism that leftists today are trying to revive.

Douglas Fraser, former UAW President, wrote a rave review of this book for the UAW magazine *Solidarity*,[3] not noted for being accepting of disagreement and dissidence. Who knows? This book may become the bible of the labor bureaucracy.

NOTES

1. "A Note on Walter Reuther," *Radical America*, Vol. 7, No. 6, Nov./Dec. 1973.
2. C.L.R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1986), p. 41.
3. Jan./Feb. 1996.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cuba's Health Care System

by Will Podmore

Theodore MacDonald, *Hippocrates in Havana: Cuba's Health Care System*, (Mexico City: Bolivar Books, 1995).

Which country in Latin America has these achievements to its credit? Infant mortality has improved from 60 per 1000 in 1960 to 9.7 per 1000 in 1991. Life expectancy has risen from 55 in 1958 to 70 in 1975 to 75 in 1991. Polio, smallpox, malaria, tetanus, tuberculosis, measles, whooping cough, typhoid, and diphtheria have all been wiped out by a public health program using vaccination and clean water. The answer is Cuba.

The Cubans have treated industry as the necessary basis for independence and for a national health service. They have organized the production of comprehensive medical care. Developing a pharmaceutical industry owned and controlled by the Cubans themselves was especially important. After the Revolution, the Cubans nationalized the two U.S. pharmaceutical companies on the island. Prices were radically lowered and production was increased. By 1974 output has risen by 80 percent in volume and by 300 percent in type. Cuba can now produce from its own resources the whole range of standard vaccines. It has also developed the Hepatitis B vaccine.

In this way, and many others, they have turned a liability into an asset. The U.S. economic blockade and campaign of terrorism have failed. For in response the Cubans have become increasingly self-reliant. Cut off from the international pharmaceutical trade,

Will Podmore is a Medical Librarian at the British School of Osteopaths.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they have developed one of the most effective pharmaceutical industries in the world.

They have continued to develop their acute medicine, including high-technology and world-standard research development in some areas, for instance automation of encephalograms, the analysis and diagnosis of certain neurological disorders, and automatic intraoperatory monitoring of brain surgery. They have seen this as vital to the effort continuously to improve the standards of primary care and preventive medicine.

They have allocated resources to training and employing vast numbers of health personnel. There are 31 thousand doctors and 40 thousand nurses. The doctor-patient ratio is 1:300, better than in Britain's. Before the revolution it was 1:2000.

They have a truly national health service, one that is fostered and funded by the Government. All medical care is free at the point of access to every citizen; it is equitably allocated, not rationed. Treatment is given according to need, as judged by the best clinical standards, not by credit card.

A brief review cannot begin to do justice to the wealth of material in this book. It is thoroughly researched and sparklingly written. It should encourage all those who read it to think about what we need in order to have an effective national health service in our own country.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF LABOUR ECONOMICS

The Journal, in print since 1958, is published quarterly as the organ of the ***Indian Society of Labour Economics*** which is a broad-based organisation in which all schools of analysis are welcome to participate. The chief aim of the Journal is to promote scientific studies in labour economics, trade unionism industrial relations and related topics. Apart from peer-reviewed articles and research notes, the Journal publishes communications of seminars and conferences, documentation of important Government reports/research studies concerning labour, selected labour statistics, and book reviews.

Recent articles include :

- **Employment, Labour Market Flexibility and Economic Liberalisation in India** — *Amit Bhaduri*
- **Health, Poverty and Labour** — *T.N. Krishnan*
- **Workforce Restructuring, Wages and Want : Recent Events, Interpretations and Analysis** — *Sheila Bhalla*
- **The Informal Sector Reconsidered** — *Jan Breman*
- **Policies for Rural Labour : From Relief to Structural Change** — *V.M. Rao*
- **Employment and Labour under Structural Adjustment : India Since 1991** — *Jayathi Ghosh*
- **Organising the Unorganised Labour : Some Issues** — *Abdul Aziz*
- **Safety Net of the National Renewal Fund : Some Basic Issues** — *Indira Hirway*
- **Unemployment and Large-Scale Industries : A Historical Study of the Roots of Labour Surplus in the Jute Industry** — *Arjan de Haan*
- **Attack on Poverty and Deprivation : Role of Structural Change and Structural Adjustment** — *C.H. Hanumantha Rao*
- **A Note on Measurement and Use of Poverty Estimates** — *Yoginder K. Alagh*
- **Development and Employment** — *S.R. Hashim*
- **Labour Market Flexibility and the Indian Economy** — *Ajit K. Ghose*
- **Economic Reforms and Employment in India : Projections for the Year 2001-02** — *R.N. Agarwal and B.N. Goldar*
- **Government Interventions and Social Security for Rural Labour** — *S. Mahendra De*

Annual Subscription Rates		
	Individual	Institutional
India	Rs. 150	Rs. 300
Abroad	US $35	US $55

Payments in the form of bank draft/ cheque may be sent in favour of *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*. Rs. 12/US $3 should be added extra in the case of outstation cheques.

All editorial and business correspondence should be made with the Editor/Managing Editor, The Indian Journal of Labour Economics c/o Institute of Applied Manpower Research, I.P. Estate, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, New Delhi-110002, India. Phone/Fax : 3319909

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDIA, THE PRESS AND THE RISE OF THE HINDU RIGHT

'Communalism becoming news is not dangerous. News becoming communal is'
– Delhi Union of Journalists

In this major analysis of the Indian press's collusion with the Hindu Right's anti-Muslim agenda, journalists and academics **Charu Gupta** and **Mukul Sharma** demonstrate how serious its consequences are for the future of India as a nation.

ıilable in bookshops or direct from the
titute of Race Relations,
› Leeke Street, London WC1X 9HS, UK.
ıd cash with order. Airmail postage add £1.50/$3.00.

RACE& CLASS
July 1996
£4.50/$8.00

A HUNDRED YEARS...THE SONG AGAIN
PAUL ROBESON
THE BRIGHT MORNING STAR

—Meridei LeSueur

LEOPOLD MÉNDEZ, MEXICO

April 9, 1998 is Paul Robeson's 100th birthday. Artists, educators, and community activists have come together to reintroduce this proud African American athlete, scholar, singer, actor, and fighter for justice in the mainstream of American history.

The vast majority of Americans do not recognize the name of this Renaissance man. Groups all over the country are coming together to reestablish the name of Paul Robeson. In particular, help is needed for a national campaign for a Robeson centennial postage stamp. Letters and petitions should be sent to: Dr. Virginia Noelke, Chair, Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee, 475 L'Enfant Plaza S.W., Rm. 4474, Washington, D.C. 20260-2437.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Birthday Song by E.Y. Harburg

Sung to the tune of "The Streets of Laredo"

When I was a lad
I wrote amorous ditties,
To Judy, Aleine, Edelina, and Sue,
But now that I'm gray
I've abandoned those pretties,
I'm singing my songs to the MONTHLY REVIEW.

For as you grow older
You sometimes grow wiser
If brain cells are plenty
And hormones are few
Why torture yourself with Elaine or Eliza
You're safer by far with the MONTHLY REVIEW.
That most intellectual
Slightly sub sexual
Marx will protect you all, MONTHLY REVIEW.

For fifteen long years
I've perused and pursued her,
I've waited whole months
For a sight of her too
Whatever her mood
I still wooed and renewed her
That beautiful, sensible MONTHLY REVIEW.

II

I followed her madly
From Vietnam to China
To Cuba to Ghana, New Guinea, Peru,
I may have been faithless
To my Edelina,
But not to that siren, the MONTHLY REVIEW.
That wise and effectively
Spoken objectively
Let's love collectively MONTHLY REVIEW.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her light is the light
In the eyes of all lovers,
Her voice is the sound
Of a morning that's new
I take her to bed
And I find between covers
The comforting lines of my MONTHLY REVIEW.

Her format is lovely,
Her layout historic
Her foresight and hindsight
Are beautiful too,
Forgive me for being
So meta-euphoric
I swoon for my beautiful MONTHLY REVIEW.
That wholly reliable
Vibrant and viable
Tho F.B.I.-able MONTHLY REVIEW.

III

So here's to the goal
Of her bold aspirations,
And may the great day
Of her dream soon come true.
A lot more subscriptions
A few more donations
Will speed the good health of the MONTHLY REVIEW.

Oh bright be her journey,
Her long road made easy,
And strong be the hearts
Of her staff and her crew,
And blessed be her pilots
Brave Huby and Sweezy
And all the fine friends of the MONTHLY REVIEW.

And let us remember the Sybils, the Hubys,
The Harrys and others who brighten this night,
We honor their courage, rejoice in their humor
We sing in their spirit
We walk in their light.
With their anti-insanity
Free from all vanity
Friend of humanity MONTHLY REVIEW.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from inside back cover)

stepson in a political case in the 1970s. Paul and Harry edit *Monthly Review* magazine today, with the help of some friends of my generation (and some of my son's generation!). They have kept the faith, and have seen some of their key predictions come true. For example, the long term stagnation of the U.S. economy that set in during the early seventies and has lasted to this day (real wages are lower today than in 1973!).

I wrote a book, *Law and the Rise of Capitalism*, which Monthly Review Press published. Time and again political leaders and students have come up to me in third-world countries and said they had read my book because of their affection and respect for *Monthly Review*. *Monthly Review* magazine has been (and is) read by leaders of movements for social change on several continents, by Nelson Mandela, and by Subcomandante Marcos.

Recent issues have featured sharp critiques of: The post-modernist fad among academics; The attacks on government social programs by mainstream economists; The politics of "free trade" and "competitiveness" in Canada and the U.S.; A special double-issue focused on capitalism and the internet.

Monthly Review has been around since 1949 and there is no magazine in the English language quite like it.

I urge you to subscribe.

Sincerely, Michael Tigar

Subscribe *please!*

Purchase one subscription at the regular price and send the second and third gift subscriptions for $25

○ **$28 one-year (U.S.)**

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

○ **$25 one-year gift**

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

○ Visa ○ MasterCard

Card Number/Expiration Date

MONTHLY REVIEW ♦ 122 West 27th St. ♦ New York, NY 10001
e-mail: mreview@igc.apc.org 1-800-670-9499

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from inside front cover)
war protestors and political dissidents. Throughout his legal career, no matter if his clients were mainstream or critics from the left, Tigar has used the courtroom to expose and thwart the manipulation of capitalist state power. Writing in *Law and The Rise of Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press) Tigar described "a new jurisprudence of insurgency," and called for "lawyers truly committed to social change [who] will...take a clearly revolutionary position" in the fight for a humane society; in other words, socialism.

Toobin attacks Tigar's study as "dated academic Marxism" and misses the book's point. In fact, the book is a trenchant study of the structure of law and legal institutions as they affected, and were affected by the emergence of the bourgeois social order. Its aim was similar to R. H. Tawney's examination of another societal institution in *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism* written a half-century earlier. At the time of its publication and since, legal and scholarly critics understood and applauded Tigar's work which, like Tawney's, far from being dated, has ongoing relevance both for its historical exegesis and its understanding of contemporary consequences.

The myopia of Toobin's piece is much the rule in current journalism. It is surely not a shared political vision that led the *New Yorker* to publish these articles. It is celebrity journalism that sells magazines these days. From that quarter expect no analysis of the multiple crises—political, economic, environmental—of our time.

We have just mailed the largest subscription drive we have attempted in years. As subscribers you are, naturally, unlikely to see it. We thought you might like to see the interesting letter Mike Tigar wrote for us to introduce *MR* to those who may not know about us. Perhaps you may be able to find some new subscribers yourself.

Dear Friend:

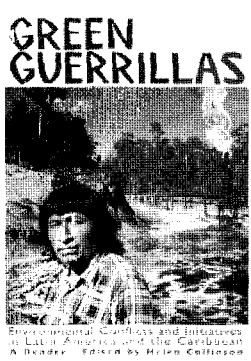
This is a letter urging you to subscribe to *Monthly Review* magazine. As a Professor of Law and a practicing trial lawyer, I see more evidence everyday that intelligent folk are rejecting the dominant market ideology. But the argument that "there is no alternative" still confuses people. *Monthly Review* magazine provides an alternative—a readable, non-sectarian analysis of the state of the world based on Marxist political economy.

Thirty-five years ago, I wanted to understand basic economic theory. Luck was with me, for my teaching assistant at the University of California, Berkeley was a graduate student named Clinton Jencks. Clint had been a militant labor leader, had successfully fought a McCarthyite prosecution effort, had returned to school to get his Ph.D. in economics. He told me to read Paul M. Sweezy's pathbreaking book, *The Theory of Capitalist Development.* He also told me to subscribe to *Monthly Review.* I did both of these things, and discovered that the political views I was considering could now be set in context.

Over the intervening years, Paul, Harry Magdoff, Leo Huberman, and Harry Braverman became friends and mentors. I represented Paul's

(Continued on page 64)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



GREEN GUERRILLAS

Environmental Conflicts and Initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean, A Reader

A Latin America Bureau book distributed by Monthly Review Press

$19.00/PB9800/paper/250pp.
Environment/Latin America/ Development

RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

Last Resorts: The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean

Silent Revolution: The Rise of Market Economics in Latin America

The contributors to this volume highlight important environmental struggles and initiatives that have received little or no attention outside of Latin America or the Caribbean. Vivid reports profiling community initiatives—from a Salvadoran coffee coop fighting for a forest threatened by a deluxe housing development to an innovative plan implemented in Brazil to reduce traffic congestion and pollution—make this book essential reading for those concerned with environmental issues everywhere.

To order: 1•800•670•9499

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED